

CATALINA ART STUDENT



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later Mrs Toulmin Smith

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CATALINA: ART STUDENT



She sat down on the nearest chair; . . . she had difficulty in
keeping herself quiet.

Cat.—Front.

PAGE 297.

CATALINA: ART STUDENT

BY

L. T. MEADE

AUTHOR OF 'BETTY,' 'FOUR ON AN ISLAND,' 'WILTON CHASE,'
'LITTLE MARY,' ETC.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

W. BOUCHER

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CATALINA.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE GREAT STUDIO.



T was the largest School of Art in England. There were classes both for men and women, both for old and young. The Art professors numbered six, and there were also assistant professors, and even Art pupils raised now to the rank of assistant teachers. There was no possible branch of Art which was not attended to, gently fostered, and allowed to grow apace in the great Randall School. The huge building itself was very imposing. It occupied a great square with a large quadrangle in the middle. There was grass in the centre of the quadrangle and walks all round. In the building itself were rooms for the head professors and their families, but the pupils and the junior professors lived, most of them, in boarding-houses, just outside the square in which the school was.

Most of the boarding-houses were owned by the junior professors; they boarded the pupils, and managed to eke out their own salaries in a very comfortable and satisfactory manner by so doing. The Art pupils were of all sorts: some of them noisy, happy, careless; some again intensely earnest, and absorbed over their work; some idle, and merely looking to the school as a pleasant means of passing an idle hour, as an excuse for coming to live in London, as a reason for avoiding the dullness of a country home. There were several of the girl Art students who came to the Randall School for really no other purpose than to avoid living at home; but amongst the lads, most had some earnest point of view, and looked eventually to make Art their means of livelihood. Amongst the girl students, too, there were more than a few who felt very solemn over the whole thing, and did their very utmost to make the most of the great advantages offered to them.

There was no branch of Art which was not attended to in the Randall School; there were distinct departments not only for the study of the figure with all its vast requirements, but also departments where modelling in clay from the human figure, and the making of models was attended to; there were yet again other departments where the newest and latest rules, with regard to the great and ever-growing profession of Black and White, were rendered intelligible to apt pupils; and of late there was a large new department,

second only to the figure in importance, where animal painting was the order of the day. The study of the living animal was a decidedly new departure in the Randall School. The idea had been first propounded by one of the youngest and cleverest of the professors. As a matter of course, it had been pooh-poohed and cast aside as not possible, but one of the visiting professors, a very important R.A., and a celebrated animal painter himself, had suddenly thought well of the idea; he had cast in his vote in the right direction, and the Art committee had unanimously carried it. A branch of the school where animal painting could be thoroughly well taught was speedily opened, and proved almost directly a great success. Here the horse and dog principally, but also the cow, the donkey, and even the domestic cat, came in for a fair share of the intelligent regard of the students.

Arrangements were made with the Zoological Gardens to allow the pupils all the advantages of studying there; in short, every opportunity was given to the young aspirants of this delightful branch of Art, and the school for animal painting bade fair to be one of the most popular of the great Art College.

On a certain afternoon in the middle of a hot summer, the silence inside one of the large studios of the animal school of painting was so great that one might almost hear a pin drop. From forty to fifty girls were all seated as closely together as possible, busily absorbed in painting and sketching in charcoal

a beautiful race-horse, which, with its attendant groom, stood close by. A boar-hound of immense proportions lay at a little distance from the horse, and a few of the students were trying to transfer his form to their canvas or paper, but most of the girls were absorbed over the fascinating occupation of sketching the horse. This was the busiest hour of the whole day. Two professors were moving softly about the room, and an assistant master was helping one or two of the least foremost of the pupils. In another studio beyond, which could be just discernible through its curtained doors, a number of lads varying in ages from fourteen to twenty were also engaged in copying an animal from the life. To the left of the girls' studio, a flight of stairs led to studios where the study of the animal cast was going rapidly forward.

The professors moved gently from easel to easel. This morning was certainly one of great excitement. The visiting professor, Edward Forde, A.R.A., was present, and each student was eagerly longing for a word, a look, even a glance of recognition. He was a tall, dark man, of about thirty-five years of age; his face was tanned with the heat of many southern suns, and his whole appearance denoted foreign extraction. This branch of the school was essentially his own; it was he who had first thought of it, and who had worked it up to its present state of perfection.

An eager, dark-eyed girl of about fifteen years of age watched him as he walked along. He was still

a good way from her easel ; nevertheless, she hoped that he would look at her efforts. He stopped before the easel of a tall, bright, flashy-looking girl with red hair, and the dazzling complexion which generally accompanies the colour. She was dashing away boldly at her picture, putting in broad touches, and making on the whole an impressive result ; he bent over her, said not the slightest word of encouragement, but suggested, more by an expressive motion of his hand than by any word, an easy way to overcome a grave difficulty. Her eyes beamed with intelligence, she filled her brush with paint anew, and continued her difficult task.

The girl who was seated rather to the front kept on watching Professor Forde with eager eyes. She had not yet been promoted to colour, and was endeavouring to convey the likeness of a boar-hound to her paper. Her efforts in charcoal were bold and striking enough to show even to the most casual observer that she possessed a great deal of latent talent, but it was also evident that at the present moment her knowledge was small.

The race-horse shuffled his delicate feet, he deliberately moved the weight of his body from his right foot to his left. By so doing he upset the point of view of every student in the room. Some of the girls were, however, prepared for this contingency ; they immediately changed the canvas or paper on which they were working for another which lay by its side.

On the second canvas or paper they instantly sketched the horse from his new attitude, intending to come back to their former sketches, the moment he changed his feet again; thus these girls worked at two pictures at the same time. This was also an idea of Professor Forde's, and he smiled at a thin, anxious-looking girl, when he saw that she had taken advantage of his suggestion.

'That is well done, Miss Carlton,' he said; 'I see you are not inclined to waste a moment of your valuable time.'

'No, Professor, I want to get on,' she replied. Her words came out in a very low voice, and a flood of crimson swept over her face. Several of the neighbouring students gave her a glance, half jealous, half admiring. Professor Forde had actually said that Jessie Carlton had done something well; she was immediately the heroine of the hour.

Meanwhile, the youngest girl shuffled her feet uneasily: she glanced up at the clock; it wanted five minutes to one. At one o'clock there was recess and an hour for lunch, at two the school began again and went on without interruption until five. Professor Forde would leave almost immediately. Oh, if he would only come and speak to her! The last time he had visited the school he had done so; he had stood over her easel for a brief moment, and corrected a refractory limb with a single sweep of his charcoal. Then Cata-lina had gone home with flushed cheeks and a beating

heart, to tell her father and mother and her sisters and brother that Professor Forde had actually given her a *soupçon* of encouragement. They were all pleased to hear this, and spoke of it by-and-by to their several friends. Her father in particular was more than pleased, and Catalina would do anything in all the world for him. Would the Professor speak to her to-day? He was really not far away from her easel; there were only three girls between him and her. Catalina could not help giving these girls a withering glance. They would never be artists; they did not know the meaning of the word. Oh! surely the Professor must understand, he must guess how badly, how very badly she wanted him to tell her what was the matter with that boar-hound's front paw. Try as she would, she could not make those delicate toes come right. There was something wrong with the perspective, and just a touch from an experienced hand would put the whole drawing into focus. Oh, if he would only hurry! Perhaps he saw her, for he suddenly hastened his footsteps, but the next moment his eyes glanced at the clock.

‘I had no idea it was so late,’ he said. ‘Good-morning, young ladies.’ The next instant he had left the school.

Catalina bent forward as if nothing had happened. Not for the world would she allow the students near her to guess at her disappointment: her thick, dark hair falling about her shoulders half concealed her

cheeks; her little thin face was bent so low over her work that no one observed the tears which trembled for a moment on her black eyelashes; her brows were knit in a frown. Well, whether the Professor came or not, she would master her difficulty. There was a great smudge of charcoal on her cheek. There was no longer anything to hope for; she must puzzle out that wayward foot alone. Come what would, those toes must be correctly represented on her paper. The right focus must be obtained; she would work out her difficulty, she would overcome it. The clock overhead had not yet struck one. Before the hour sounded, she was determined to catch that boar-hound, and transfix him for ever in a lifelike attitude on her paper.

‘All the same, it was cruel of him not to come,’ she reflected. ‘I did hope so much that he would have looked at my drawing. Well, it will be far grander if I can get things right alone; but oh dear, dear, I just can’t; now it looks worse than ever.’ She glanced with the criticism of silent despair at the hopeless front foot. ‘Oh, if even Mr Fortescue would help me,’ she cried in her heart.

Mr Fortescue was the youngest of the assistant masters. He must almost have heard Catalina’s unspoken thought, for just at that moment his voice sounded above her head.

‘You are doing your work very nicely, Miss Gifford,’ he said.

Catalina glanced back at him with an almost frowning face.

'No, I am not,' she replied bluntly; 'don't you see for yourself that the front paw is hopelessly wrong?'

'Turn it this way, and it will be all right,' said the master. He rubbed out Catalina's bungling work, and put it in two or three strokes himself. 'Now, don't you see?' he said.

'Oh, thank you; but how stupid of me not to have done it alone,' she said.

Mr Fortescue moved on without another word. Catalina's boar-hound now looked lifelike, but she had not conquered the main difficulty herself, and the professor had not been near her. In her opinion, the morning was more or less a failure.

The clock over her head struck one sonorous stroke. Instantly the silence of the great studio was broken; all the girls began to congregate together, to chatter, and to laugh. The masters disappeared as if by magic, the doors between the two studios were thrown wide open, and several of the girl students joined the boy students in the room beyond; they then went off in couples to lunch in the great central hall, where refreshments were provided for all the Art students at a fixed rate.

'Catty, are you coming into the hall to lunch?' said a merry-faced Irish girl, going up to the little Art student, and bending over her.

'Not to-day,' answered Catty; 'I have brought sandwiches with me.'

'Did I not tell you long ago, you silly girl, that there is no nourishment in sandwiches?' said Bridget O'Brien, accompanying her words by a laugh. 'Didn't I ask you to come and lunch with me in the hall? I am going to have soup—you can get splendid soup for sixpence a plate, and hot as it is, I have a craving for it. Do come, Catty, just for once—never mind those sandwiches—you don't know how white and worried you look.'

'I won't come to-day, thank you, Bridget,' replied Catalina. She stood up as she spoke, and rubbing her hand across her flushed face, made the smudge of charcoal all the broader.

'Oh, child, look at yourself in the glass when you go into the dressing-room—I cannot help laughing when I see you.'

'What is the matter? What have I done to myself?'

'Look in the glass, and you'll know; but whisper, just before I leave you—has anything put you out?'

Bridget came close; she was full of fun and frivolity, but good-natured to her heart's core.

'He never came near me, Bride,' replied Catalina. 'And oh, it meant so much, particularly this morning. Don't tell any one—I must bear it, I suppose. It is fate.'

'He'll come another time, you little silly. Well, I wish I could drag you off to the hall—I'd make you eat something, and then you'd be a lot better. I cannot stay another minute now, dear.'

She ran off, and Catalina put her easel slowly away; she then stood for a moment looking round the room. In an instant her eyes lighted upon the boar-hound, and a smile of satisfaction filled them. She went up to the great creature, and patted it on its big head; then she glanced round. No one was observing her. She bent low until her curling, beautiful dark hair swept across the boar-hound's neck.

'Roy,' she said in a whisper, 'I am angry with you. You might have told me—I, who love you so well—you might have told me the secret of how to manage that right foot.'

The dog fixed her with a loving and intelligent eye; she clasped her arms round his neck, and kissed him on his big forehead; then she hurried off into a neighbouring dressing-room to fetch her lunch. She had brought sandwiches made with stale bread and slices of corned beef; she also had an orange. Oranges were getting sadly dry and woolly now. Several other girls remained in the studio to lunch, but most of them had provided themselves with baskets of strawberries, and bottles of lemonade. The day was certainly intensely hot.

Catalina, who had seen the smudge on her cheek while in the dressing-room, had washed it away.

She now looked tidy and respectable; there was a certain foreign grace about her which every one remarked; her eyes were deep and black, full at times of a passionate longing; her mouth was beautifully formed, and piquant in expression. Her coal-black hair, full of natural curl, grew so low round her pretty forehead, that it would have been impossible to give England credit for its rich abundance.

‘My grandmother was Spanish,’ said Catalina once when her friends had questioned her. ‘I am called after grandmother—her name was Catalina—but I am English,’ she continued, her eyes flashing—‘I am all English; I don’t wish to belong to any other nation.’ Then she had stamped her foot, and frowned, and her face had flushed full of vivid colour. Her companions found out that it was very easy indeed to make Catalina angry. They did not like to tell her it was her Spanish blood. But they also discovered about the same time that her anger was like a thunder-shower—if very vivid, also very brief, then out flashed sunshine, which made her charming and beloved.

‘Come and sit close to me, Catty,’ said a pretty, blue-eyed girl of the name of Lucy Gray. ‘Oh that dry old orange; you shan’t eat it. Take some of my strawberries; I have brought this great basket full.’

Catalina was so absurdly proud that she would much rather have eaten her dry orange, but Lucy’s manner was irresistible, and Margaret Ashton, a tall,

handsome girl who stood near, had once lectured Catty on her pride. Remembering this lecture now, she sat down on a low stool, and picked strawberries deliberately out of Lucy Gray's basket.

'We are talking about the composition for next month,' said Lucy. 'Are you going to do one, Catty?'

'Certainly,' replied Catalina.

'What a tone you say that "certainly" in. But is it not a queer subject? I have not the least idea how it is to be managed. "A Vision of the Night;" what can Mr Forde mean? Now, such a subject would be all very well for landscape-painters, but for us'—

'Oh, I have an idea,' said Catalina, lowering her long eyelashes, and taking another strawberry out of Lucy's basket.

'You? I daresay you have. You are the soul of poetry, and all that sort of thing,' said Margaret Ashton; 'but the fact is, I have never troubled myself with visions of any kind, and how I am to put what I know nothing about on paper, puzzles me.'

'Then perhaps you won't try,' said Catalina, a little timidly.

'I don't think I shall, *chérie*, so that gives your composition all the more chance of being approved of.'

'I am certainly going to do my best,' repeated Catalina; 'a great deal depends on it,'

'What? Do say, little mystery,' interrupted Lucy Gray, with a laugh.

Catalina paused again before she replied.

'I think you must know,' she said then, speaking with a sort of deliberation which always marked her words, and added to her decidedly foreign style, 'you must surely remember that the girls who are allowed to try for the scholarship must be commended in the subjects for composition two or three times during the session.'

'But good gracious, child,' said Margaret Ashton, 'you do not mean to say you are going in for the scholarship?'

'Yes, I am; if I am commended for this composition, I shall try for the scholarship next session. I shall be allowed to, and I shall certainly do it.'

'What a firm way you speak,' said Lucy Gray. 'Well, I admire you; but don't you think you are very audacious. Why, you are not in colour yet.'

'I study colour at home,' said Catalina. 'I am not afraid,' she added. 'If I am commended now, I shall be allowed to try, and I will try. I can but fail.'

'I admire you,' said Lucy again.

Margaret bent forward to look at the painting on her easel; she could see it quite well from where she sat. She was taking a good, bold, straightforward side-view of the race-horse. Her outline was absolutely faultless, the horse was in perfect proportion,

every limb was in drawing; but Catalina knew, although she could put it into no words, that Margaret was not making a picture—she was simply copying a horse. It might be a good likeness of the race-horse, although—no, it was not even that—it was too lifeless. There was no go, no sense of movement; the whole thing was wooden.

‘Maggie is painting that horse beautifully, is she not?’ said Lucy Gray, following the direction of Catalina’s eyes.

Catalina did not say anything.

‘Come, Catalina,’ said Margaret, a little pique in her voice, ‘tell me what you really think of my picture?’

Catalina raised her eyes in alarm, then she regained her courage.

‘I am no judge,’ she said.

‘Yes, you are, monkey, a splendid judge. Jump up now, and give us your honest opinion. Can you see a single line out of drawing?’

‘No, not one; the outline is perfect,’ said Catalina, honesty and relief in her tone.

‘Come, you have a great deal more to say; I am not going to let you off so easily. It doesn’t matter in the least what a monkey like you says or thinks, but I will have your honest opinion. What is wrong with the race-horse?’

‘As a copy of the horse, it is as right as possible,’ said Catalina.

‘Then, oh, you know, Catty; you disapprove of it.’

‘Well, I wouldn’t have painted him like that,’ said Catalina at last.

‘You? And how would you have managed?’

‘In the first place, I would not have taken him in profile; that view is’—Catalina’s face flamed all over—‘is easy, and therefore commonplace.’

‘Commonplace,’ cried Lucy Gray, with a laugh. ‘Hark to the little professor. What next, Catty, youngest pupil in the school?’

‘It is unfair to ask me,’ said Catalina, her easily ignited temper taking sudden fire; ‘but as you do ask, I will just say, I would have made him look as if he meant to fly, as if he felt the spirit of the race that was before him. I would have just distended his nostrils the merest trifle, and I would put some fire in his eyes, and oh—there, it’s all nonsense. Only, if you will have it, when I look at him I see a dream horse, and he is flying over one of the American prairies, or over one of the Russian steppes, and—you hear the rush of the wind as he goes by; but please don’t encourage me to talk any more nonsense. Lucy, I am so much obliged for those strawberries.’

‘You are welcome, little professor,’ said Lucy.—‘Now, Margaret, I hope you feel nicely snubbed?’

‘I honestly respect and admire little Professor Gifford,’ said Margaret. She stretched out her hand to Catalina, who grasped it. Tears suddenly filled the big dark eyes.

‘You are not angry with me, Maggie?’ she said.

‘No, child, I only envy you. You have got what I have not. You will doubtless be able to make something of “A Vision of the Night;” but I must repeat again, what a subject for a composition!’

‘Are you going to do one, Margaret?’ said Lucy.

‘Not I; the time is much too near the holidays. As soon as ever the school breaks up I am off to Cornwall. Uncle Rolf has taken a house there, and he has hired a yacht for the season. We shall be on the water all day. I doubt if I shall give many thoughts to the Randall School while I am in Cornwall.’

‘I wish I had the luck to be going to the country for three months,’ said Lucy.

‘Are you not going away this summer, Lucy?’

‘I suppose so, for the usual fortnight in August. We shall go to Margate most likely. Oh, I shall enjoy it when it comes. I love dear old vulgar Margate. We always go in for the whole thing when we are there, and don’t we enjoy ourselves, and aren’t we vulgar of the vulgar? But August is a long way off, for the school breaks up, as you know, on the 27th of this month.’

‘Which happens to be the hottest June I can remember,’ said Margaret Ashton.—‘Well, Catalina, what are you going to do in the holidays?’

‘Stay at home,’ said Catalina, ‘and study for the scholarship.’

‘You quite look as if you will enjoy it.’

‘I shall enjoy the time while I am studying,’ answered Catalina stoutly.

She rose as she spoke, and shook some crumbs of bread from her blue overall; she then ran off to wash her hands, preparatory to resuming her work.

The two other girls left behind gazed after her retreating form.

‘What a little spitfire,’ said Lucy Gray.

‘Yes, but I honestly admire her,’ said Margaret. ‘I believe there is something in her. How hard she grinds at her work, and how satisfied she is to take all that tiresome, unceasing pains which Professor Forde insists upon new students going in for. “Genius is the infinite capacity of taking pains” must surely be the motto of his life. Few of our girls stand the test, but she is doing it, plucky little thing. I am sorry Mr Forde did not speak to her to-day; a nod or even a look from him would have made her happy for a week. She is always put on to Mr Fortescue, who is quite the least intelligent master in the school.’

‘Well, you see, she knows very little as yet,’ said Lucy Gray.

‘I doubt that she knows so little,’ replied Margaret; ‘she has the right stuff in her at any rate.’

‘By the way, Maggie,’ said Lucy, ‘she gave it to you pretty hot, did she not?’

Margaret knitted her black brows.

‘Any one else would have praised my horse,’ she said, after a pause; ‘even Mr Forde said it was well done. I am not angry with her, I admire her much, but of course I don’t understand her.’

‘She was hard on your efforts,’ said Lucy. She looked at the horse, a new criticism in her eyes, and said again, ‘And it is well done, it is excellent.’ Under her breath, however, she added, ‘It would do admirably for a sign-board.’

CHAPTER II.

THE PROFESSOR'S TEA.

IVE o'clock came all too soon, and then the great school broke up, and the students began to pour out from every door in groups of tens and twenties. Most of them went quickly to the boarding-houses which surrounded the school, but Catalina and several other girls started off to walk down a long, dull-looking street which led in the direction of Bloomsbury. Catalina carried a net bag over her arm. This contained a roll of paper, a box of charcoal, and some other implements necessary for her art. She walked somewhat slowly now; the great heat of the day made her a trifle languid. By-and-by she reached her home, one of the dullest of the dull houses, which seemed to shut away all the light and freshness of the exquisite summer afternoon. She ran up the grimy steps of the ugly house, and rang the loose and rickety bell at one side of the door. The moment she did so, a frowzy head was poked up from the area below.

'Is that you, Miss Catty? I thought it was. Do you mind coming down the back way, please, miss? Jane has left in a tantrum, and there's no one but me to do anything.'

'Jane gone,' cried Catalina. 'Of course I'll come in the back way, Alice.'

She ran down the area steps, and entered the house by the kitchen entrance.

The cook, a girl of five or six-and-twenty, looking very hot and untidy, put up her hands to straighten her cap as Catalina entered the house.

'Do stop a minute, miss,' she said. 'I'd like to tell you about Jane.'

'I can't really wait, Alice; I am late as it is. Is father in?'

'Yes, miss, the Professor came in a good while back.'

'I'll come down and you can tell me about Jane presently. Has father had his tea?'

'No, miss, not yet; there's no tea gone upstairs yet.'

'But is not mother at home? Aren't the girls in?'

'They are all out, every one of 'em, miss, except the Professor.'

'Well, I must go to him at once; don't keep me.'

Catalina ran up the kitchen stairs, and entered the long, narrow hall, which was covered by dingy and much-worn matting. The house was wonderfully quiet. At this time of day, as a rule, it was full

of noise, commotion, the clatter of feet, the clacking of tongues, the sound of spoons, cups and saucers, knives and forks; in short, the universal sound of the universal family at its universal meal. This afternoon the big ugly house seemed empty.

'It is all quiet and delightful,' muttered Catty under her breath, 'only of course father wants his tea.'

She ran upstairs, rattling her net bag as she did so. She reached a broad landing on the first floor, and knocked at a door which was sadly in want of paint. A voice said 'Come in;' she opened the door and entered.

A tall, thin man, with gray hair and a high forehead, was seated at the farther end of the room; he was bending over a large table, spectacles on brow, and several dictionaries and sheets of paper by his side.

When Catty came in, he was moving a thin hand mechanically in the direction of a large Latin lexicon.

'Is that you, Catalina?' he said. He did not glance at her, but opening the lexicon began to hunt up a word.

'Yes, father,' she said. She ran up to him, flopped down her bag on the floor, flung her arms round his neck, and hugged him two or three times.

'I was wanting that kiss,' she said. 'I am better now.'

Mr Gifford was professor of Sanskrit, Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian at the Burlington Museum. He

was a very learned man, and like many others of his species lived in the clouds. He rubbed his hand across his forehead now when Catalina gave him her fierce, brief embrace—then a misty look came into his large, thoughtful, gray eyes, and he stroked the little girl's hand with his thin fingers.

'Don't interrupt me, my love,' he said; 'this is my last lecture of the session on Hebrew literature—I have brought down my pupils to the beginning of the fifth century. I am due at my lecture at six o'clock, and have some final and very important notes to make. What is the hour, Catalina ?'

'Half-past five,' said Catalina eagerly. 'Can't you see for yourself, father ?' She glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece as she spoke. It was a little Bee clock which she and her brother Teddy had purchased between them to give to Professor Gifford on his last birthday. The little clock never went very well—it had a painful habit of catching somewhere in its inner mechanism; it then required to be shaken violently, altered in its position, patted on its sides or back, and put gently into a new attitude. For a wonder, to-day it was going, and its hands pointed to half-past five.

'Only half an hour,' murmured Mr Gifford; 'I shall never get done. You had better not interrupt me, Catty,'

'No, I won't,' said Catalina. 'Only just answer me one question—have you had your tea ?'

'Tea ? I—I don't remember.—Ah, thank you, my

child, that is the book I want. Pray don't speak, my dear. I really must get these final notes into order.'

Catalina gave her father a Hebrew dictionary—she then quickly and with noiseless footsteps left the room.

'Whatever happens,' she said to herself, 'father must have his tea before he goes out to that lecture. I know what those Hebrew lectures take out of him; they are worse even than the Sanskrit or the Persian. He seems to throw his whole heart into them—to live in the subject, and they exhaust him, oh, dreadfully; he does look white and dead when they are over. I am thankful this is the last of the course. I know he takes scarcely any lunch at the museum; mother ought to see about it, but somehow she won't. Dear old daddy, he would live without eating if he could. He is for ever up in the clouds. By the way, it is very nice living up there—they are a favourite resting-place for me also—but never mind, I am wide awake enough when I think of him.'

Catalina flew down to the kitchen, looking quite brisk and lively.

'Is the kettle boiling, Alice?' she said.

'Kettle boilin', Miss Catty? 'No, 'tain't wanted to be boilin' at this moment.'

'How stupid and tiresome of you, Alice,' said Catalina, her black eyes flashing. 'Father hasn't had any tea yet, and he must go out immediately. Here,

turn on the gas; I'll boil the water on the gas-stove. Only put a very little into the kettle, please. Oh dear, dear, what a good thing I have come in! Please, Alice, poach an egg as quickly as ever you can, and bring the bread and butter into the kitchen; I'll cut some. He'll be off in less than a quarter of an hour, and he simply must swallow his tea, and take two poached eggs—he must, and shall. Oh, won't you help me, Alice ?'

The girl, good-natured enough at heart, stared at Catalina for a minute, and then flew off to attend to her behests. The kettle boiled; the tea was made, hot and fragrant; Catalina flew from kitchen to pantry, from pantry back again to kitchen. A tray was brought, it was covered with a white cloth; a cup and saucer, teapot, bread and butter, and a little dish of poached eggs were all placed upon it, and Catalina prepared to leave the kitchen.

'You mightn't be in such a hurry, miss; I've a deal to tell you.'

'I'll come down afterwards; don't keep me now, Alice.'

'I'll take that tray up for you, miss.'

'No, I can do it myself.'

The tray was decidedly heavy, and Catalina staggered as she walked. She mounted the kitchen flight of stairs, paused for breath on the ground-floor landing, and then went up to the first landing where her father's study was. She opened the door without knocking,

and proceeded steadily up the room, bearing her little tray of fragrant and nicely-prepared refreshments.

The Professor's head, seen in the distance, looked decidedly bald; the few remaining hairs he possessed were stuck up in wild disorder somewhere at the back of his head; his spectacles were situated in the middle of his forehead; he had forgotten all about them, and was frantically searching for a word in the Hebrew dictionary with his short-sighted eyes. Without uttering a word, Catalina put down her tray, slipped the spectacles back into their proper position over the Professor's eyes, and then poured out a cup of tea.

'What is it, little woman? what are you fussing about?' he said.

'I am not fussing at all; do go on and find your word. You have plenty of time; you need not start for five minutes. Now I am going to hold a cup of tea to your lips, and you are going to drink it.'

'How insistent you are, child! Well, don't make it too hot, and put in plenty of sugar.'

'How many lumps?'

'I don't know; any number. I cannot quite get at the meaning of this point. I must make it clear; the whole argument hangs on it.—Ah, that tea is good, my child; I was really very thirsty.'

Mr Gifford drank off the fragrant cup, which Catalina put in the most enticing way just under his nose.

'Fill up another, my dear girl. I declare my brain is clearer already. Sometimes I think, Catalina—



Without uttering a word, Catalina put down her tray.

Catalina, sometimes I think—— Well, never mind at present, my love ; I am not quite as young as I used to be, that's all.'

'No one is as young as they used to be, who doesn't eat,' said Catalina, with a flagrant disregard to grammar. 'Now your eggs ! we can't afford to throw away nice poached eggs, so you must eat them up. Here, take your knife and fork. What word do you want ?'

'You cannot find it, puss.'

'Yes, I can. You didn't try to teach me Hebrew for nothing, when I had that cold last winter. What is the word ? I'll get it. Give me the dictionary, quick. Now, we'll make a bet about it. I'll find the word before you have finished your poached eggs. What is it ?'

The Professor named the required word which was to give him the clue to the difficult point. Catalina hunted assiduously ; her pale cheeks felt hot ; her face was never capable of acquiring much bloom, but there was a tender pink like the centre of the heart of the faintest blush rose on each cheek now ; her great eyes grew soft as well as bright.

'Eureka !' she cried, 'I have it. Are the eggs finished ?'

'Not quite. Give me that dictionary ; I really shall be late.'

'No, you won't ; and a bargain is a bargain. You are not to get the word until you have finished your eggs, or you lose your bet.'

‘You are a perfect little tyrant.’

‘I don’t care what I am. I know what is good for you, you dear old, forgetful baby of a father.’

The Professor’s eyes twinkled.

‘How dare you speak to me in that disrespectful way, you monkey !’

‘A bargain is a bargain,’ said Catty, with a gay laugh. ‘Are the eggs finished ?’

‘Yes, every mouthful.’

‘Well, here is the word. Now, are not young eyes good for something ?’

‘To be sure, child ; that is capital. Let me make a note. What is the hour ?’

‘Ten minutes to six.’

‘I must be off; I shall be late as it is.’

‘You generally are late, you know,’ said Catty meekly.

‘How dare you insult me, Catty !’

‘You are to have another cup of tea, and you are to gulp down that bread and butter.’

‘I shall choke; I am full to repletion. Was there ever such a tyrant of a daughter ?’

‘I can be a very fierce tyrant, as you will see to your cost. Now, obey me, sir, at once. Ah, that’s good.’ Catalina began to jump about in her excitement. Her father put on a resigned and martyr-like air. He drank off his tea; the little teapot was emptied, and the last slice of bread and butter on the plate finished.

'Now you are a dear, good old man,' said Catalina.

'A dear, good old man,' he repeated; 'I was a baby a minute ago.'

'You are both,' she laughed. 'If I did not look after you, you would be in your second childhood in no time. Now there's a darling, precious daddy; give me one kiss to make me happy, and off you go, you and your musty Hebrew.'

The Professor kissed her; he was really in a hurry, but he kissed her slowly. Then he put his trembling hand on her forehead.

'God bless thee, little witch,' he said. The next moment he had left the room.

By the time he reached the landing he had forgotten all about Catalina, all about his family, the tea he had eaten, and everything in the world except the Hebrew lecture which he was about to deliver.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROFESSOR'S FAMILY.



ATALINA'S lunch had been a slight one, and she felt decidedly hungry herself. When her father had banged the hall door behind him, and she had listened for a moment in the queerly silent house, she thought she would run down to Alice, find out the meaning of this extraordinary change in the domestic arrangements, and beg for a cup of tea on her own account. But the thought had scarcely entered her mind before she heard the fumbling of a latchkey in the front door, and the next moment a stout, middle-aged, florid-faced lady entered, accompanied by two tall, slim-looking girls, not the least like Catalina in appearance, and a dark-eyed little boy. This party entered the establishment with considerable noise; the stout lady sat down immediately on a chair in the hall, and catching sight of Catalina half-way up the stairs, called to her in a loud voice to come down.

‘Come here at once, Catty. Thank goodness you are in. Well, have you heard the mess we are in? What

do you think Jane has done? Left quite suddenly in a tantrum this morning, and you know the Maxwells and the Butlers are coming to-night. We cannot possibly put them off, and there is nothing for it but for us all to put our shoulders to the wheel.'

'But who is to wait?' asked Catalina; 'who is to bring the tea up, and the supper?'

'Alice must; there, children, you need not stare at me as you are doing; I know what I am talking about. Alice must be simply coaxed into a good-humour. Catalina, my dear, your sisters and I have just been round to three registry offices to try and get in a servant at a moment's notice; but of course there is no such article to be found. Oh, I am dead tired; it is awful to have to rush about when you are stout like I am, and in this hot weather and all.—Agnes, don't stand staring in that silly way.—Rose, what is the matter?—Here, Teddy, my child, take these parcels at once from your poor mother. Run up with them to my room, and leave them on the bed, dearie. I declare, children, you none of you seem to think that I am ever to feel tired, and I am sure I have been pegging away all day as hard as any one.—Catalina, you are in one of your dreams; wake up this minute, miss. You are exactly like the Professor; you will grow up just such another.'

'But she is not a bit like father, mother,' said Rose. 'She is as dark as a gypsy, and father has quite a nice complexion.'

'Oh, I mean in mind,' said Mrs Gifford; 'I think nothing at all of outward appearance. That child's mind and the Professor's mind are as like as two peas in a pod. Now Catalina, for goodness' sake, wake up, and exert yourself. I do wish I had never given in to that fad of the Professor's to have you called after his mother. That ridiculous foreign name has been your undoing; it just encourages you to grow into the queer creature you are becoming. Here, take my bonnet and mantle, run upstairs with them, and then bustle about, all three of you. I wish with all my heart we could put off the Maxwells and the Butlers; but there! the invitation is a week old, and I suppose it would look queer. Thank heaven, I've got my breath again. It is awful to be stout: you slim young things don't know the meaning of it. Rose dear, you are the most diplomatic of us all; go down to the kitchen at once and soothe Alice's pride, flatter her up, do anything in the world to put her into a good-humour. Oh, where's that cardboard box, with Peter Robinson printed on it? Yes, take this to her; there's a new cap and apron inside. Tell her I have bought them as a little present, and that they are in quite the newest style. Rose, you see that she puts them on properly, and oh, for goodness' sake, look yourself and ascertain that the cups are clean and have no smudges on them anywhere. There, children, I am much better now; I'll go away and dress, and then help to get the drawing-room to rights. We may have a pleasant evening after all.'

'I do wish, mother,' said Catalina, speaking for the first time, 'that you would put off the Maxwells and the Butlers. It would be so easy to write a couple of notes. If you wish it, I'll write them for you and take them round. I could say that'—

'Now what could you say, Miss Pert?' said the mother. 'Go on, Catty; you have a delightful, headlong way of getting out of difficulties. I should just like to hear what you would say.'

'Oh mother, don't laugh at me, please; I would just tell them the truth.'

'Oh,' laughed Rose.

'I never heard anything better than that,' said Agnes. 'Please mother, don't waste any more time over Catty; we know what she is by this time.'

'Yes, we know what she is,' said Mrs Gifford, rising to her feet. 'A nice crow Mrs Maxwell would have over me, and Mrs Butler, too, for that matter. Catalina, you are just as unpractical as the Professor.'

Mrs Gifford brushed past her little daughter, and began to walk up the stairs. She was very stout, and the stairs creaked a good bit as she passed over them. She passed the Professor's study and turned into her own bedroom, where she shut the door behind her.

'I am sure I am quite willing to help,' said Catalina, looking at her two sisters. 'You always shut me up so dreadfully. I cannot imagine why you are making this fuss. Surely there is no disgrace to us in a stupid,

silly servant going away at a minute's notice. Why should we half kill ourselves, and why, when father comes in, is there to be no nice hot supper for him? Oh, I hate the whole thing,' continued Catalina, her eyes flashing; 'I detest humbug. If we cannot afford to have people properly to the house, why do we have them at all?'

'Well, they are coming now, so you can reserve your lecture until after they have gone,' said Agnes, in a cool, sarcastic voice. 'In the meantime, please try and make yourself of some use.—Teddy, you had better go to father's study, and learn your lessons.'

Edward, a little dark-eyed boy of ten years of age, went slowly and mournfully up the stairs. He at least, in his heart of hearts, applauded Catalina's words. He was very sorry indeed that the Maxwells and Butlers were coming to have tea and light conversation presently in the drawing-room. He knew what it meant to him. Even if Jane had not gone away, it would have meant bread and milk at the best to go to bed upon, and now he even doubted if the bread and milk would be forthcoming.

'And what do they come for?' he thought. 'I am sure they are not a bit nice; they never ask me to go and play with their boys; they never do the kind of thing that would help a fellow. I believe they don't care a scrap for Agnes and for Rose. Oh dear, Catalina is the only one of the family who has got

any sense. Why do they laugh at her? I love her the best of them all.'

He entered the study, which was very close and stuffy. It did not occur to him to open the windows; he was very hungry, poor little chap, after his long day at school, and he really wanted his tea. Seeing there was no chance of such a meal being forthcoming, he opened his lesson books sorrowfully, and began in a stupid, half-hearted sort of way to apply himself to his Latin exercise, which he was to prepare for next morning's school.

Catalina and her two sisters were meanwhile in a sort of whirl. Alice had to be petted and propitiated, the drawing-room had to be hastily dusted—for Jane had left quite early in the day, long before she had performed her usual duties—cups had to be washed, trays polished, silver rubbed up; in short, there were a hundred and one things to do, and each one was cross and each one was hungry.

‘Where there's a will, there's a way,’ however, and long before eight o'clock, the Giffords had contrived to make the house look something in its usual condition; the drawing-room, a large room facing the study on the first landing, had been got into some sort of order, the chairs had been pulled about into picturesque positions, a few fresh flowers had been hastily stuffed into two or three vases, the windows had been opened about an inch from the top so that a little current of air could filter through the ugly room, a table with

cups and saucers and the appliances for a modern tea were placed in order at one end of the room. Rose and Agnes had hastily cut sandwiches, and these, with claret cup, were to be brought in later by the now obedient and almost excited Alice. In short, the grand difficulty had been got over, and the eagerly-looked-for guests would never know that the parlour-maid had left in a huff that morning.

‘Half-past seven and everything done,’ said Rose, clapping her hands gleefully. ‘Now we’ll just have nice time to go upstairs and dress. You have been a very good girl, Catty, and you can come down to the drawing-room for a little if you like.’

‘I would much rather not,’ answered Catty stoutly. ‘I don’t care a bit for the Maxwells and the Butlers.’

‘Much you know about them,’ said Agnes, flouncing past her sister. ‘You don’t deserve ever to see our friends.’

‘Never mind her,’ said Rose; ‘she is just a silly child, and never will be anything better if she insists on spending her life at that stupid Art school. But all the same, Agnes’— Here Rose ran up to her sister, and began to whisper in her ear.

‘Yes, I know,’ said Agnes. She paused and looked at Catalina.

‘I am sorry, Catalina, if it is disagreeable to you,’ she said, ‘but I am afraid we must have you in the drawing-room to-night. If mother or Agnes or I look at you, you’ll know that you have to go out of

the room and poke up Alice. You must keep your eyes wide awake, and notice if we even give you a glance; in short, you'll be wanted for several things. You need not talk, of course; you can just sit with your book in one of the windows, and then if you are very good you can have one sandwich and claret cup by-and-by.'

'You had better not offer me any,' said Catalina, 'for I am just now in such a state of simple starve, that if I begin to eat, I shall gobble up the whole dish. By the way, we have none of us prepared anything for father's supper. What is he to have?'

'Oh, there are sure to be plenty of sandwiches left, and he can have bovril if there is nothing else. Don't bother us about that just now.'

'And poor little Ted! he has not even had his tea yet. What is he to have?'

'I declare, Catty, you are enough to drive one wild; we have not had any tea either, but we don't make such a fuss. There, if he must be attended to, take him down to the kitchen and cut him a slice of bread and butter yourself.'

'I just will,' said Catalina.

She ran out of the drawing-room, opened her father's study door, and ran up to Edward.

'Come along, Ted,' she said; 'if you're half as hungry as I am, you'll be glad of a hunch of bread and butter in the kitchen.'

'Glad!' said the child gleefully; 'I'll be more than

glad. Catty, I've such a great big hole inside of me, that I don't think I really could learn my lessons if I didn't have something to fill it up.'

'Well, and I have a yawning gulf,' said Catalina, laughing. 'If you and I do not fill up these cavities of nature before we do any more work, why, we don't belong to the Professor.'

'It is awfully jolly belonging to the Professor, isn't it?' said Edward, with one of his shy smiles. He was a very gentle little fellow, and was in consequence much put upon by his spirited sisters, and his somewhat overbearing mother. Catty alone understood him, and he loved her with all his small heart.

'There is not a minute to waste,' she said now. 'I had meant to work up one of Mrs Browning's poems, there is so little time to get my composition ready; and I know one of the poems will help me. Heigh-ho! I mustn't talk of that just now; come, Ted, what a good thing we have a kitchen to go to, isn't it?'

They ran downstairs, satisfied the gnawing pangs of hunger, and then Edward slowly, and with a much more tranquil expression on his face, returned to his lessons.

'Catty,' he said, as he paused for a moment at the study door, 'you won't forget that I shall be very hungry again at nine o'clock.'

'There is not much fear of my forgetting,' said Catalina; 'I have the Professor on my mind.'

‘I’m very glad ; perhaps you’ll remember me too.’

‘Rather ; but I may have to take whatever I can smuggle away up to your bedside. Don’t wait up, Ted ; are you likely to be awake, though ?’

‘I may be asleep, but do wake me, for I have such horrid dreams when I go to sleep hungry.’

‘Very well, I won’t forget.’

Catalina noisily slammed the study door, and ran off to the bedroom which she shared with Rose. Rose had already gone downstairs, so she had the tiny room to herself ; she changed her tumbled cotton frock for her Sunday best, and then ran down herself, prepared to take her part in the coming fray.

Agnes and Rose were both in the drawing-room ; they were singularly pretty girls, possessing their father’s regular features and the brilliant colouring, which had now degenerated into floridness, of their mother. Agnes was nineteen, and Rose seventeen ; Agnes had the most character, and Rose the most good-nature. Catalina did not resemble any of the rest of the family, and Mrs Gifford was fond of reminding her of this fact.

‘No one would suppose you had anything to do with us,’ she used to say. ‘Where did you get that swarthy complexion ?’

Now Catalina’s complexion was a clear olive, which would doubtless be lovely by-and-by. She used to feel ashamed of her little face when her

mother spoke in these taunting tones; but once the Professor happened to overhear, and then he had said something so decidedly, with such a flash in his eyes, and such a glance of open-eyed admiration at Catalina, that she had learned the truth. The truth from her father's lips had made her not vain but thoughtful. She felt as if a great weight of responsibility had been put upon her.

'Some day, child,' said the Professor, 'some day, perhaps not far distant, you will find that you have been given the wonderful, miraculous gift of great beauty. Your grandmother was a famous beauty, and you take after her. With beauty and genius, what may you not make of your life?'

When Catalina entered the drawing-room now, she took her seat behind the shelter of one of the drab curtains. The room was not, in any sense of the word, æsthetic. It was years and years since it had been redecorated, the paper on the walls was faded, the paint was downright dirty, the carpet was dingy, and the drab curtains—well, they were drab of the ugliest tone, and quite hopeless.

Catalina worshipped beauty of all sorts. She was the sort of child to live always more or less in a dream world. In some of her dreams she was fond of seeing the Professor's drawing-room as she would have liked it to be; she half screwed up her dark eyes now, sat back in her corner, and began her imaginings.

'Velvet curtains,' she murmured under her breath,

'very rich and heavy; deep tones of yellow and chocolate in them; a carpet of'—she gazed at the shabby, threadbare carpet—'flowers'— She started almost to her feet; a loud peal sounded through the house. Catty was rudely shaken out of her day-dream. Enter Rose in a hurry, with a bunch of blush roses in her belt. Agnes ran to meet her from where she was standing on the hearthrug. Mrs Gifford, with her face still deeply flushed, but looking imposing in a red silk which had done service for best for as long as Catty could remember, came in, panting as she did so.

'Catty, did you hear the bell?' said Rose. 'Child, do let me poke that collar straight, now you are better. I do trust Alice is letting them in properly. I wish, Catty, we could have turned you into the parlour-maid for the nonce.'

'I'd have done it with all the pleasure in the world,' answered Catty; 'I'd have thought it rare fun.'

Rose looked at her critically.

'It is too late to think of it now,' she said; 'I hear them coming up.'

The next moment the drawing-room door was thrown wide open, and two showily-dressed girls, accompanied by a simpering youth of twenty, entered the room; they were the Maxwells, commonplace, wealthy people. Rose, Agnes, and Mrs Gifford thought it well to make a great fuss over them, however; they greeted them effusively, offered them

the most comfortable seats in the room, and Rose going to a distant corner, began to pour out tea.

Albert Maxwell strolled across the room to assist Rose, in reality to flirt with her. Rose, blushing vividly and looking pretty, called to Catalina.

‘Come and help,’ she said. Catty emerged out of her hiding-place. She and Albert between them carried round the tea; there was bread and butter in tiny rolls, also a plate with infinitesimal morsels of cake. The eldest Miss Maxwell was talking to Mrs Gifford in a loud voice.

‘It is all arranged, and you must come,’ she said: ‘we have quite made up our minds that you and the girls are to be some of the party; we’ll hire a steam-launch and go down as far as’— Here she lowered her voice. ‘You really must not refuse, Mrs Gifford; I know some one who will never forgive us if you do’ —here she glanced meaningly at her brother Albert. ‘Your share of the entertainment will only be’— She dropped her voice again.

‘What is it?’ said Rose, coming forward; ‘any fun? Oh Kathleen,’ she continued, laying her hand on her friend’s plump shoulder, ‘are you really talking about the water party for Saturday?’

‘Yes, we have it all arranged’ said Kathleen Maxwell. ‘Mother thinks the steam-launch will be best; we can go up the Thames as far as Teddington; we’ll take lunch with us and tea as well. The weather is lovely just now, and the days are the

longest; the Blunts, and of course the Butlers, are coming. We count on you all, remember; you cannot possibly refuse.'

'If you won't come, I shall stay at home,' said Albert Maxwell, looking at Rose.

Catty, in the distance, watched the scene; she wondered how Rose could allow an insignificant, freckled, sandy youth like Albert to talk to her as he did; why had Rose, too, such a beautiful colour on her face? Catalina felt inclined to stamp her foot.

'We count on you all, remember,' said Kathleen again.

'You certainly are very kind' said Mrs Gifford in a dubious voice. She was thinking of the necessary subscription; her purse at the present moment was very light.

'Of course we'll come,' said Agnes, who now came forward to join in the discussion.

'The subscriptions will not be more than £1 a head,' said Kathleen, in a voice which seemed to say, 'and no one would surely think anything of that.'

'We shall be very pleased to accept,' said Mrs Gifford; she glanced at Rose's expressive face as she spoke.

'But mother, mother, you forgot, you promised'— interrupted Catalina.

'Now Catty, please hold your tongue,' said Rose; 'you always are a little spoil-sport, you know.' She laughed as she spoke, but there was indignation under

her words. 'It is settled that we are to go, and now we can plan everything,' she said. 'Did you say the Blunts were going, Kathleen? Will Charlie Blunt be there?'

'Will he not?' said Kathleen; 'I told him about Agnes, and' —

Agnes blushed and began to talk to Albert Maxwell. Catalina walked back to her shelter in the window.

'It is even more odious than usual,' she thought to herself, as she wrapped the drab curtain partly round her. 'I wonder if I can think a little bit of my composition here; I surely need not listen to any more of that sort of nonsense. Only to think of father's supper and my evening being spoiled by people of that sort. It is very wrong of mother and of the girls to go on the river. Father has not got the money: £1 apiece, indeed! Those rich Maxwells talk of that as nothing, but I know better. Why should mother pretend, and why should the girls pretend that we are well off when we are not? How I hate this sort of humbug.'

There came another ring at the bell; Rose started, and looked anxiously in Catty's direction. It came a second time, and Mrs Gifford now also glanced at Catty.

'There is no help for it; I must act the parlour-maid,' thought the little girl. 'Alice has funk'd her duties, and I must rise to the occasion.' She dashed downstairs and opened the door.

Mrs Butler, accompanied by her two handsome daughters, stood without.

‘How do you do, Catty?’ said the mother.

‘I am very well, indeed,’ answered Catty in her grave voice.

Mrs Butler’s face seemed, however, to be still full of question.

‘Our parlour-maid left this morning,’ continued Catalina; ‘she left quite suddenly, I suppose in a huff; I was at school at the time, so I don’t know. I do hope you were not kept waiting long at the door.’

‘No, my dear child,’ said Mrs Butler. She looked kindly at Catalina; she thought none the worse of her for making her little confession.

‘I am afraid it has been very inconvenient our coming this evening, Catty,’ said Hester Butler.

‘Well, it has, rather,’ replied Catty frankly; ‘but mother, and Agnes, and Rose would not dream of putting you off. I know I ought not to have told you. Everything is quite nicely arranged now, but if you see me flying round a bit, you won’t mind, will you?’

‘Mind?’ said Hester; ‘for my part, I shall admire you for it.’

Catalina took the new visitors into a small room on the ground-floor, where they deposited their wraps. She then conveyed them up to the drawing-room.

The Butlers were really nice people, and soon contrived to give a new tone to the conversation. Tea was handed round once again; the subject of the great Saturday picnic was discussed in all its bearings. Catalina felt lost and out of it; she was also tired and sleepy. She could not help glancing many times at the clock. At this hour, as a rule, that is, when she was not wanted elsewhere, she used to find herself snugly ensconced in the Professor's study, deeply buried over his books. The Professor had heaps of books, both classical and modern; he bought in books of every sort and description; he lived for books; he seemed to breathe them into every pore, to assimilate them, and find them the staff of life.

Catalina equally lived and breathed for Art; the only books she specially cared for were romances and books of poetry. To night she had promised herself to read Mrs Browning's *A Vision of Poets*; she thought it would help her to give voice and expression to the idea already forming within her little mind with regard to this month's composition, 'A Vision of the Night.' It was horrid, therefore, to have to sit in the ugly drawing-room and listen to the vapid, uninteresting conversation. After all, however, why should she listen, why should she not forget every one and go back to her dreams?

Suddenly Hester Butler's voice sounded very near her corner.

'Catty,' said Hester, 'come here; I want to speak to you.'

Catty jumped up from her low seat, and went forward.

'Bring a chair of some sort and sit near me,' said Hester.

Hester was eighteen years of age; she was tall, fair, and dignified-looking; she was also very pretty.

'Do you know,' she said, 'that I am the friend of a great friend of yours?'

'Who is that?' asked Catty.

'Margaret Ashton.'

Catty's dark eyes began to fill with light; her pale, piquant little face woke up.

'I am very fond of Margaret,' she said; 'she is always kind to me.'

'Yes, Margaret is a fine creature, said Hester; 'but Catty, I am surprised that you are fond of her.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean this: you have a queer way of showing your affection. She told me how critical you were over her picture to-day.'

Catty flushed and then laughed.

'When you are asked a plain question, you must tell the truth or be a coward,' she said, after a pause.

'I quite understand,' replied Hester, gazing at her with admiration; 'most people choose the latter alternative, Catty; I'm glad that you are one of the brave ones.'

Catalina was silent.

‘Margaret said nice things of you,’ continued Hester; ‘she hopes some day that she may see a great deal more of you; she also thinks that you have a very bold, intelligent way of depicting Art yourself; she expects that some day, Catty, you may really be a painter.’

‘I mean to be,’ answered Catalina with fervour.

‘Do tell me what you do all day at the Randall School?’ asked Hester, bending down and looking into her face.

‘I struggle with difficulties at present,’ said Catalina.

‘I believe you, child. And so some day you really mean to be a painter—a great painter?’

‘Yes,’ said Catalina.

‘You do speak in a determined voice; have you no doubts on the subject?’

‘I have not any; I shall succeed or die.’

‘You don’t talk in at all a vain way,’ said Hester, after a pause. ‘I suppose you are right; I suppose you will succeed, but you know it is not easy to be a great painter.’

‘I know that, but I mean to be it.’

‘Well, I repeat that I quite admire you. You are not the least like your sisters, Rose and Agnes; I don’t suppose they have any special ambition?’

Hester looked lazily up the room as she spoke; Rose and Agnes were laughing and chatting with her

younger sister, and with the three Maxwells; Mrs Maxwell, Mrs Butler, and Mrs Gifford were having a council of three in the farthest window. Catty and Hester were really quite alone.

‘You are not the least like the others,’ repeated Hester. ‘I believe I shall take a fancy to you, although I do not as a rule care for girls as young. But how old are you, by the way?’

‘Nearly fifteen.’

‘And I am nearly nineteen. There are four years between us; at our time of life that makes all the difference; I mean that I have passed the Rubicon, and you are still nothing in the world except a child. Child, I honestly like you; you must come and see me some day. Once, when I was young—oh no, you need not look at me in that startled way; I am no longer young in your sense—I thought that perhaps I, too, would be an artist; I went to the Randall School for a term. I thought it would be great fun, and I went in very hard for the study of the antique. My dear, that term bowled me over, finished me completely; I was sick of Art long before those weary thirteen weeks had passed; oh, how stuffy the studio was, and, Catalina, some of the students were not even clean, and the whole place was so rough; in short, I found all my beautiful Art oozing out of my finger-tips. At home, you know, my governess used to praise everything I did, and I seemed as if I wanted praise, as if I could not get on without it.

But at the Randall School, I never got any praise, however hard I tried: I only got blame, blame, and yet more blame; so I funked the whole thing at the end of the first term, and once for all gave up the idea of becoming an artist. Catty, my dear, I shall be an art critic instead, I shall abuse other people's efforts and make myself very much respected and very much feared; in fact, thought twice as much of as you will ever be, little monkey. Catty, when you are a great artist, you will tremble at my critical words.'

'All right,' said Catty, laughing; she looked towards the door as she spoke.

'What is the matter? Do you want to get rid of me?'

'No, but I am waiting for father to come home.'

'The Professor?' said Hester. 'They say he is one of the most learned men in London. How many languages does he know, Catalina?'

'Oh, a great many,' replied Catty. 'Hebrew, and Persian, and Sanskrit, and two or three modern ones; but father never had any difficulty in learning a language. He knows a great deal besides; when he opens out some of his knowledge, and lets you look at it, it is wonderful.'

'Does he do that for you?'

'Oh, sometimes; it is delightful when he does.'

'You love him very much, do you not?'

'Better than any one else in all the world.'

'I am told that he is a very fascinating man—that is, when he likes.'

'When he likes, he is,' answered Catalina.

'Not always, child?'

'No, not always; sometimes he shuts himself up, you know, and then, then—then he is something like a man in a box—you cannot get at the real Professor, however hard you try.'

'I wonder,' said Hester, 'if he will come in here to-night, and let us get a peep at the real Professor.'

'I don't think he will; he will be much too tired. He was tired when he went out, and not very well. Oh, I do think I hear his latchkey in the door; I must go to him. You'll excuse me, won't you, Miss Butler?'

'Call me Hester, Catty; you and I are going to be friends, you know.'

'Well, may I run away to father, Hester?'

'Certainly you may.'

Catalina flew from the room, and Hester Butler went up to the other end where the rest of the party were chatting gaily together.

'How dull you must have found yourself talking to that child,' said Rose.

'Dull?' cried Hester. 'I have got to confess something, Rose,' she added.

'What is that?' asked Rose; she admired Hester Butler more than any of her other friends.

'Well, it is this, Rose: I have committed an indescre-

tion; I have fallen over head and ears in love with that beautiful little sister of yours.'

'Beautiful! Catalina beautiful?' said Rose, opening her eyes wide in astonishment.

'Why, of course she is,' cried Hester. 'Did you never notice what remarkable eyes she has, and that quantity of dusky hair, and that dear little pure olive-tinted face? Oh, I know she is thin and angular, like all other girls of her age; but wait, Rose, until she is seventeen, or even before; you will see then that all the rest of the world will share my opinion.'

'I am very glad,' answered Rose, but she scarcely looked it.

CHAPTER IV.

SEVEN O'CLOCK BREAKFAST.



HEN Catalina went to bed she was dead tired. She had managed to satisfy her growing appetite, and felt quite certain that when she laid her head on her pillow, she would fall instantly asleep. To her astonishment, this was not the case; the reason was easily accounted for—she had taken an anxiety to bed with her. Now an anxiety is by no means a comfortable bedfellow, and it kept Catalina awake during the early hours of the long night. She was intensely, painfully anxious about the Professor. She knew well that no one else in the house understood him as she did. She was naturally an affectionate, warm-hearted, amiable child—it was her nature to love all those with whom she came into daily contact, but her love for her father, growing greater day by day and year by year, had now almost assumed the intensity of a passion. Yes, she was certain, as she flung herself from side to side on her

hot, little bed, that no one else really understood her father. To others he was just the universal book-worm—scholarly, of course, a perfect gentleman notwithstanding his shabby, dusty clothes, and his unkempt appearance, but scarcely a human being in the ordinary sense.

Catalina, however, having found her way straight to his heart, had established herself there in a cosy and comfortable nook. As a matter of course, from the moment she had reached that place, she began to understand him as no one else did in all the world.

He had looked pale and worried when he came in that evening, had scarcely taken in the fact that there were people in the drawing-room, but had shuffled straight off to his study, to sink into his accustomed arm-chair with a tired, limp, old expression on his face. Catalina brought him in some hot bovril and toast; she knelt by his side as he partook of his simple supper.

‘The moment you have finished that, you are to go to bed,’ she said.

He did not reply to her, but laying down the empty cup, stared vacantly into her face for a moment.

‘Something queer happened to-night, Catty,’ he said suddenly.

‘What?’ she asked.

‘I cannot understand it myself.’ He passed his hand before his dim gray eyes as he spoke. ‘Yes, it was very queer. Do you know, I forgot some of

my lecture. You remember how carefully it was all prepared; but I either forgot the principal argument, or I could not see it. I had the notes before me, but all the words seemed to dance up and down. I made a sad hash of it, and a man near the door tittered. It was the sound of his laugh that woke me up. I came to myself with a start, and finished off the whole thing in double quick time. Yes, I am dead beat; I'll go straight to bed. I must get up very early in the morning, though, for there are several papers to be prepared before I go to the museum. Good-night, my child.'

He rose abruptly, walked down the long study, and opening the door, closed it softly behind him. He forgot the little girl he had left behind, he even forgot to give her his accustomed kiss.

Catalina clasped her hands tightly together as she watched his retreating form. Her heart began to beat a little too quickly for pleasure. What was the matter? Was anything the matter? Had she any cause for alarm in the simple fact that the over-tired Professor had forgotten his lecture. Yes, she thought she had. She knew nothing whatever about breakdown in the ordinary acceptation of the word —she had no acquaintance with illness, medical knowledge was as foreign to her as her father's Sanskrit; still she thought, gravely and dispassionately viewing the whole situation, that she had cause for uneasiness. If the Professor had forgotten anything else, it

would not have mattered so much. He was a very hazy, dreamy, forgetful sort of person about all ordinary matters; but when once he approached his beloved Sanskrit, his adored Hebrew, his musty, fusty languages of the dead long ago, then he instantly woke up, and was, in short, a new man. The Professor was at this time one of the most splendid lecturers of these ancient tongues in London. So keen and varied was his knowledge, so enthusiastic his appreciation of these old-world matters, that he had managed to convey some of his own enthusiasm into the brains even of the dullest scholars.

Once or twice, on rare and delightful occasions, Catalina had heard her father lecture, and although she knew nothing of the subject, and had no love herself for the old, dead-and-gone languages of the past, she could not fail to notice the quality of his voice, the rare sweet musical tones, the gracious utterances, the perfect eloquence with which he delivered himself of his large ideas. She had felt proud of him at those moments. She had thought her lot as the Professor's little girl about the happiest in the whole world. What did he mean to-night by saying that he had forgotten? Surely, whatever else he forgot, he could never be puzzled or put out in that province which was to him his own familiar country.

The thought of her father kept tired little Catty wide awake; it made her forget her School of Art,

her own longings and ambitions, her personal hopes and fears.

'I know what it means; it can mean nothing else,' she thought. 'It is simply overwork and not enough food; the Professor does not eat enough, and when he does eat he does not get nourishing enough things. Oh, if only mother would see how important it is. Of course, mother loves him; but if she only would see. Yes, I know he earns a good big income, but there are so many of us, and the girls are extravagant; they want a lot of dresses, and they want to go about; and father gives away all the money he gets the minute he earns it; he does not keep half enough for himself. Mother and the girls ought not to go to the picnic; I wish I could prevent them. They ought not to waste the Professor's money. Father ought to have a change, and at once; he shall have it, that is, if I can manage to open mother's eyes. Oh dear, how I wish I were older or more important. They none of them mind me; they think me only just a mere child.'

She dropped off to sleep at this juncture. When she awoke, the bright summer sunlight was pouring into the room; the clock on the mantel-piece pointed to half-past six. With a bound she sprang out of bed.

'Time for me to get up,' thought Catalina. 'I am determined father shall have a good breakfast before he goes to the museum; he has been up already,

in all probability, a couple of hours. I'll give him his breakfast at once.'

Catty dressed herself with speed; she had just accomplished the tying of the last string, and the putting in order of the last lock of curling dark hair, when Rose opened her eyes.

'Good gracious, Catalina, what is the hour?' she cried, starting up in bed.

'About twenty minutes to seven,' said Catalina.

'What are you up for, child?'

'I am going downstairs to get breakfast for father; you remember we are a servant short.'

'As if I am likely to forget; but Catty, father does not want his breakfast at this hour.'

'He is to have it at seven o'clock,' said Catalina; 'father is not half as strong as he ought to be, and he wants a lot of care. I am going to give it to him; I can't wait now, Rose.'

She left the room, slamming the door noisily behind her.

'How disagreeable Catty grows,' murmured Rose to herself; she sank down again in her snug little bed, and was quickly in the land of dreams.

Meanwhile, Catalina had reached the kitchen, where she found Alice looking very cross and disagreeable, and not too well pleased to see her.

'Oh lor'! miss, how you startled me,' she said.

'I have come to help you, Alice,' said Catty in a pleasant voice.

Alice stared at her for a moment, then her brow cleared.

'Well, you are a good-natured child,' she cried. She was instantly soothed into good-humour.

'You could not do everything by yourself, of course, Alice,' said Catalina.

'Well, no, miss, no more I could; but Miss Catty, you do look tired; you work too 'ard, miss. Surely it's bad, copying them himages all day long.'

'I don't copy images,' said Catty; 'I copy dear live horses, and sweet noble dogs. Of course I shall have to study the figure presently.'

'They say some of 'em are idols, and some of 'em have no clothes on,' said Alice; 'I call it ondecent.'

'Oh well, never mind now, Alice; I want you to help me so badly; I have a great worry on my mind.'

'There, my dear, I'll do my best,' said the good-natured cook. 'I always did admire pluck, whether it's in girls like myself, or little ladies like you. You never will own to being tired, Miss Catty, and you do stick at a thing wonderful. Now, why shouldn't Miss Rose and Miss Agnes have got up to help a bit this morning? They do nothing all day except just to amuse themselves, while as to you'—

'We are made differently,' answered Catty. 'If they had thought of it, they would have done it. I have thought of it, so I have done it. Alice, I have an anxiety on my mind.'

‘Well now, my dear, I wouldn’t have, if I were you. It’s really bad for growing girls to get anxious.’

‘It is about father.’

‘Eh? the Professor? They do say he’s the most learned man in the whole of England.’

‘They say what is quite right,’ said Catalina. ‘Now, I don’t think he is very well, though he never will complain; and Alice, I want him to have a most beautiful breakfast. I want it to be so nice that he won’t be able to help eating it, and then he’ll go off to the museum, well fed, whatever happens. Can you help me, Alice?’

‘To be sure,’ said Alice.

‘I want to give him his breakfast at seven o’clock,’ continued Catalina, ‘and it is only about a quarter of an hour to that time now. What shall we give him?’

‘Well, this is fun,’ said Alice. ‘We seem to be sort o’ thieves in the night, don’t we, miss? doing on the sly what we ought not to. If we give the Professor a good breakfast, there will be no eggs for the rest by-and-by.’

‘As if that matters,’ said Catalina.

‘Miss, I know it don’t.’

‘But is it to be eggs, Alice?’

‘Yes, Miss Catty; there’s nothing so sustaining. What do you say to a homelet, miss, made with four eggs? He could eat up the whole, and scarce know he was eating it.’

‘Could you make it nicely?’

'When I've a mind, I could,' said Alice, looking thoughtful.

Catalina had a dim memory of some horrible-looking compounds, which had been called omelets, and which had appeared from time to time on the breakfast-table; but there was a gleam now in Alice's honest blue eyes which made Catalina inclined to trust to her.

'It is awfully important,' said Catalina. 'I believe you'll do it beautifully; make it savoury.'

'I know; you need not tell me,' said Alice.

'Well, I'll leave the omelet to you, and I'll get the tray ready, and the cup and saucer. I can make lovely coffee. Alice, coffee and omelet and toast will make a splendid breakfast.'

'He's very fond o' sweets,' said Alice. 'There's just a little of the home-made marmalade left. We can fill up a small dish, and he won't know but what there's a heap at the back o' it.'

Catalina laughed with glee.

Alice bustled about, beat up eggs and prepared a clean frying-pan, while Catalina made coffee and toast. In short, the combined efforts of the two were crowned with complete success, and by the time the little Bee clock on the Professor's study mantel-piece struck seven, his little girl had entered the room, carrying a fragrant tray in her hands.

'You look better this morning,' said Catalina, kissing him.

‘I’m all right, my dear,’ he said, returning her salute. ‘Ah! breakfast—how good that coffee smells; I am really quite hungry.’

‘You have got to finish every scrap on this tray,’ said Catalina, ‘and I shall stand over you while you do it.’

‘I am really very hungry,’ said the Professor. He looked eagerly at his cup while Catalina filled it with coffee; she stood over him silent, smiles playing round her lips, while he ate the omelet, and consumed the home-made marmalade, and finished all the toast. When he had emptied the coffee-pot, she stooped down and kissed him.

‘You have brought me a very refreshing breakfast, my dear, and I feel miles better for it,’ he said. ‘The fact is, sitting so long without anything to eat has of late given me a queer craving.’

‘Hunger, father; that’s the name for the craving,’ said Catty, laughing.

‘Is it? Is that sensation due to hunger? I really was not aware.’

‘You ought never to have it—it is very bad for you. Well, now I’m going to see that you have a nice breakfast every morning at seven.’

CHAPTER V.

THE FORDE SCHOLARSHIP.



T the real, proper eight o'clock breakfast, Mrs Gifford looked cross and worried; the dull parlour appeared no better for the absence of Jane; it had not even been dusted; the meal, too, was carelessly prepared, and consisted of nothing more appetising than bread and butter, some rather sodden toast, and a ham bone which had very little meat upon it.

Catalina came in with her hair untidy, and her collar awry; she had been up a long time, and it was never her custom to give any thought to her personal appearance; she sat down opposite to her mother. Ted had long ago snatched his breakfast and gone to school; the two elder girls had not yet put in an appearance. Mrs Gifford and Catty were alone in the breakfast-room.

‘Now, for goodness’ sake, Catty,’ said her mother, ‘sit straight, child. You’ll grow up crooked, if you hitch one shoulder above the other in that ugly fashion. Now, that’s better. What was I about to

say? Oh, now I remember; I must go to a registry-office the moment I've swallowed my breakfast, and try to get a substitute for that odious Jane. By the way, Catty, did I tell you why she left so suddenly?

'No, mother, but I don't think there is time just now.' Catty looked anxiously at the clock as she spoke.

Mrs Gifford suppressed an impatient sigh.

'I certainly am not blessed with sympathetic daughters,' she said. 'Provided you can get off in time to that blessed Art, you don't take interest in any one single thing that happens in the house.'

'Yes, yes, I do, mother; you quite mistake me.'

Mrs Gifford laughed.

'Have the goodness to pass me the toast,' she said. 'There! sodden, unfit to eat. Nothing gives one such indigestion as sodden toast; I'll have a slice of bread and butter. No, don't you attempt to cut it; you'll chop off your finger if you do. I wonder what makes you so awkward, Catalina. For my part, I will say frankly that I detest and hate the genus Art student. The whole tribe are alike neglected, untidy, ill-educated. As a rule, an Art student can scarcely spell, and for some reason or other she is always dirty. Why a child of mine should think it a fine thing to belong to such a lot'—

'Oh! but mother, you misrepresent things,' said Catalina.

‘There you are ; I misrepresent things, indeed ! Pray, miss, don’t attempt to contradict your mother.’

‘But father says,’ began Catalina.

Mrs Gifford pulled her chair closer to the table.

‘You need not go on, Catty,’ she said ; ‘your father approves of all this Art nonsense—encourages you, in fact. I have no doubt he leads you to suppose that some day you’ll be a shining light, a sort of female President of the Royal Academy. Well, my dear, you always seemed to belong more to him than to me, and I suppose I must bear the state of things as patiently as I can ; anyhow, there’s not the least use in my trying to interfere.’

Catalina’s eyes filled with tears.

‘I’d give it up if I could,’ she said.

‘You’d do what, Catty ?’

‘I’d give it up if I could, but I can’t,’ answered the child ; ‘it is in me, it is part of me, I cannot tear the longing out of me. Oh mother, if you would try to understand’—

‘Well, dear, I don’t mean to vex you. As to understanding, pray don’t ask me, Catty ; I’ve given you up long ago. You are your father’s child, and you must be educated as he wishes. Now eat your breakfast and go. I see you are dying to be off.’

Catalina finished her cup of tea, and then, rising from her place at the breakfast-table, went up to her mother’s side.

‘I just want to say one word first.’

‘Well, child, out with it. I hope to goodness it is no sort of worry, for I am just in a condition when I can’t stand that; my poor nerves are all of a shake. I’m not nearly as strong as I look, Catty. Some day, when I’m not there, you’ll, you’ll’—— Mrs Gifford’s voice quivered, and broke.

Catalina gazed at her for a moment in silence, then she flung her arms round her neck.

‘Kiss me, mummy; mummy, I love you,’ she said almost fiercely.

‘Dear child, do I doubt it? How muscular and strong you are, my dear Catalina; you have really made my poor face quite uncomfortable.’ Mrs Gifford rubbed the cheek which Catalina had saluted. ‘Now love, what is it? What do you want to say?’

‘Mother, I hope you won’t be angry, but I don’t think father is well—at least I am sure he is worried, and’——

The room door was suddenly burst open, and Rose, looking fresh and lively, appeared on the scene.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘what are you and mother hobnobbing about, Catty?’

‘Nothing whatever,’ said Mrs Gifford. ‘Catalina seems to think that the Professor is not quite well.’

‘Is there anything special the matter?’ asked Rose.

‘No, nothing special,’ answered Catalina, getting red, ‘only he seems more tired than usual; he works very hard, and he often forgets all about himself.’

‘And is that all?’ said Rose.

‘Well, I don’t think it is nothing,’ said Catalina.

‘I mean, we need not worry specially about it to-day,’ continued Rose.

Mrs Gifford rose from her seat.

‘Certainly not,’ she said. ‘Catty, you can go to school with an easy mind. Your father is in precisely the same state he has been in, to my certain knowledge, for the last twenty years. He is always pale, he always looks more or less fatigued. Did any one pry into his face, they might suppose he carried a secret care. As to his forgetting, he is about the most forgetful mortal the world ever saw; he would forget food, he would forget time. Oh, don’t say any more about him. Never, my dear Rose, and my dear Catty, either of you, as you value your peace of mind, marry a bookworm. It is all very fine to be the wife of a clever man, but really, at close quarters—there, I will say no more.’

Catalina’s dark eyes blazed.

‘Father is the dearest and most splendid character in the world,’ she said; ‘and I *know* he is not well, not as well as usual’—she gulped down a rising sob in her throat.

‘I will say what I mean to say,’ she continued; ‘yes, yes, I will, mother. You may be angry with me if you like; I must speak, just once for all. I think we ought to be awfully careful, all of us, not to spend too much of father’s money. I think it is a pity that you,

mother, and you, Rose and Agnes, are going on the river on Saturday, because' —

'Oh, that is it, is it?' interrupted Rose, her eyes flashing; 'you are jealous because we are going to have a little bit of fun, and you cannot be in it. Then let me tell you, Catty, you are extremely impertinent. What business have you, the youngest girl in the house, to dare to dictate to mother? Go away now; I am surprised at you.'

Catalina hastily left the room; her cheeks were hot, her heart was beating quickly. She had tried to interfere, and had done no good; the money which she knew was so scarce was going to be spent. Her father's health was not supposed to be of the slightest consequence.

She ran upstairs, put on her shabby brown hat, tugged on a pair of cotton gloves much the worse for wear, seized her string bag, and set off at an almost running pace for school.

She felt very hot and worried when she set out, but she had not been more than a moment or two in the soft summer air before her anxieties and fears seemed to be lifted away from her by a gentle and benevolent hand. She was about to enter that other and larger world which filled all her happiest thoughts; her little, anxious brow smoothed out; the fretful lines disappeared from her beautifully formed lips; she pushed her hair back from her forehead, and very nearly sang as she stepped lightly along. Home was

scarcely congenial, and her father's state of health made her anxious; but after all, above all, beneath all, surrounding her everywhere was Art, Art, Art—in that atmosphere she really lived and breathed. She began now to busy her active little brain over the composition which she meant to send in within the next few days.

One of the special requirements of the Randall School was that all the students should try, at least once or twice a year, to do their best in the monthly composition. A subject for composition was set each month in every department of the school. Some of the most ambitious of the students took a great interest in this, making a picture either in black and white, or in colour, on the subject each month. On the other hand, the idle and least imaginative ones were thankful to shirk this difficult, and therefore to them, disagreeable task; but twice a year at least the pupils who had brains and the pupils who had not brains, alike were obliged to do their best in this special line; this was absolutely necessary in order to enable them to keep their places in the school.

The subjects of the compositions were always announced on the first of the month; the compositions were expected to be sent in a fortnight later, and one week afterwards an honour list was published, and posted up at the door of each department of the school, bearing the names of those students who were worthy of honourable mention. The names were always pub-

lished in order of merit, and those students whose names appeared oftenest in the honour lists during the session, were selected to try for the scholarship at the beginning of the following session.

Catalina Gifford had not long been a student of the Randall School. She had worked for about a term at the study of the antique, but then had been moved to that department of the school which was given up to animal painting. Since her earliest days she had shown a passionate love for Art, and was already doing remarkably well. Three times this year she had received honourable mention in the honour list. It is true that her work was still too crude, too devoid of technical knowledge, to insure her compositions being as first rate as her great play of fancy, her poetical mind, her keen sense of colour, would by-and-by enable them to become. But the professors had already remarked on her undoubted talent, and were anxious to give her every advantage, not only for her own sake, but also for the credit of the school.

Mr Gifford was extremely anxious that Catalina should receive a sound art education. On the other hand, Mrs Gifford grudged every penny that was spent on Catalina's art career; she grumbled when a cheque had to be written for the art classes; she grudged every penny which the little girl was obliged to spend on paper, charcoal, and the other implements of her art. At the beginning of each session, Catty trembled and shook in her shoes; for if her father

earnestly wished her to become an artist, her mother, alas, held the purse-strings, and without money the little girl could not be taught. Now, therefore, the thought of the scholarship, the great scholarship, which would not only win her fame, which would not only give her a certain standing, which even her mother could not afford to despise, filled all her horizon. If she could win the scholarship, she would receive her art education free for three consecutive years. At the end of that time she might at least hope to earn enough money to pay for her art lessons.

To win the Forde Scholarship was therefore the daring hope of Catalina's ambitious little soul. She was not really vain, but she had a certain confidence with regard to the powers which she knew she possessed; daring as it was to try, she did mean at the beginning of the next session to send in her name as a candidate for the scholarship. To do this, however, it was all-important that this month's composition should be done, and done well. The subject suited Catalina; she thought she could make something of it. She had visions of going to the Zoo, of studying the lions. She thought of a sunset sky, of night falling heavily over the land, of the lions seeking their prey. Her heart throbbed; she thought she saw a 'Vision of the Night.'

She arrived now at the school, just before the hour for opening, entered with the rest of the students,

took off her hat, slipped on her overall, and going into the large studio, secured a good place for herself just where she could once again master the difficulties of the boar-hound's feet.

A tall, flashy-looking girl of the name of Rhoda Stanford was also putting her easel into order when Catalina made her appearance. Rhoda was between sixteen and seventeen years of age; she had reddish hair, and light blue eyes; her features were straight and somewhat pronounced, and but for her expression she might have been considered in some respects a handsome girl. The expression on her face, however, was the reverse of amiable, and it needed but a glance to show that she was neither a lady by birth nor education. Catty never liked to sit near Rhoda; she had an instinctive aversion to her. She disliked her manner; her Cockney twang acted as an irritant to Catalina's own sensitive nerves; she also despised the tall girl's futile attempts at Art. Rhoda was one of the three students whose easels had stood between Catalina and Professor Forde on the previous day. It needed but a brief glance to show Catalina that if Rhoda worked for ten or even twenty years, she could never, in Catty's sense of the word, produce a picture. Her drawing was waggly and feeble; it wanted power; there was not a single stroke which gave the faintest indication of strength or promise. Before Rhoda came to the Art school she had been much praised by her masters for certain water-colour

attempts to transfer flowers to paper. She was a vain girl, and fired by this praise, had begged of her parents to allow her to become a student at the Randall School. Here she was quickly doomed to find her own level. It was, alas, Catalina's province to bring the new Art student to a clear understanding of her true powers.

One day, shortly after Rhoda had first arrived, the little girl, attracted in spite of herself by the atrocious drawing and composition on Miss Stanford's easel, had paused for a moment to look at it.

'You are laughing at me,' said Rhoda, who would at that time have made friends with the pretty, foreign-looking child.

'No, indeed I am not,' replied Catalina in her grave voice.

'Then what do you think of these flowers? Don't look at this stupid copy of a horse; I don't think, after all, animals are my forte. But what do you think of these poppies? I have caught the spirit of them here, have I not?'

Catalina was silent. Rhoda glanced up at her; she noticed how firmly her lips were shut.

'Don't you think so?' she said again. 'Why don't you speak?'

'Because I *don't* think you have got the spirit of the flowers,' replied Catalina. She turned away as she spoke, and sitting down at her own easel, resumed her work. Her little speech had sounded with great dis-

tinctness, a couple of students near tittered audibly, and from that moment Rhoda was Catalina's enemy.

The tall girl quickly discovered, with the maliciousness of a commonplace nature, many ways in which to annoy the sensitive child. She observed her earnestness, her absorbed attention to her work, her valiant efforts to overcome her difficulties; she also saw with jealous eyes how one by one Catalina surmounted these difficulties, how each day her drawing grew in power, how each day she seemed to have more and more mastery over her subject. Rhoda noticed these things with an angry flush on her cheeks, and she began to look out for means of annoying Catalina.

In an Art school like the Randall, an ill-natured girl can do much to inconvenience another. Rhoda managed often to sit so as to intercept Catalina's view of the animal. Just when the little girl was busy over an important outline which required perfect steadiness, Rhoda would jump up from her easel, knock against Catalina's as if by accident, and manage to spoil her work. She would then immediately apologise in a contrite voice, but the thing happened so often that Catalina had her suspicions that it was really done on purpose.

This morning the two girls found themselves close together.

'Well, little prodigy,' called out Rhoda, 'are you going to make a muddle again of that unfortunate dog's paw? Oh yes, I saw you yesterday; I noticed how



'Rhoda, why do you talk in that tone?'

full of pleading those eyes were when Professor Forde came into the room. But he never came to help you, did he, little one? You had to put up with poor Mr Fortescue. By the way, *he* drew that right paw, did he not? Of course you'll get all the praise, but he did the work, did he not?

'Rhoda, why do you talk in that tone?' said Catalina; 'it makes me feel so bad and angry.'

'Poor little sensitive darling,' laughed Rhoda. 'Well, I'll try to consider her dear little feelings or *failings* in future.'

As Rhoda spoke, she moved her easel so as almost to touch Catalina's.

'Now *I* am going to do a good morning's work,' she said, 'and I must just beg of you to move a little into the background; you are intercepting all my view.'

'But I can't finish the picture I began yesterday, if I move now,' said Catalina.

'I am very sorry to be disobliging, but just a little, Ah, that's better. What a frown on those dark brows! A frown does not become you, *petite*. Is it possible that the little professor is cross? Oh, fie! fie! You know what Mr Johnson said a few days ago, that no girl must be selfish, and that on no account must one Art student intercept the view of another Art student. Now, my dear, I am going to do good work this morning, and it so happens that my study is to be Roy; I am quite comfortable now, thank you.'

Catalina's face had become crimson; she made a

great effort to restrain her anger. Rhoda had managed, by an adroit twist of her easel, to put Catalina completely out of position; it would now be impossible for her to continue her work of yesterday.

‘What is the matter, young ladies? No talking, and no squabbling for better positions, if you please; all set to work now.’

Mr Fortescue had come into the room; he had seen Catalina’s angry face, and noticed the sneer on Rhoda’s.

Catalina sank immediately into her seat; she brushed away the tears which began to dim her eyes, rubbed out her carefully made sketch of the day before, and began to draw the boar-hound from a new point of view. She had a very passionate nature, and just at this moment she felt full of hatred towards Rhoda. Rhoda glanced over her shoulder at her, and grinned with pleasure.

The students had now all assembled, and the work of the morning proceeded in perfect silence.

The race-horse of yesterday was supplanted by a heavy but splendidly made cart-horse. Mr Fortescue approached the animal’s side, laid his hand for a moment on its neck, and then gave a brief lecture with regard to its special points.

Most of the girls prepared fresh canvas or fresh paper, and in a short time the whole school was busily at work.

Catalina, already depressed by the different occur-

rences of the morning, and feeling quite hopeless at having to rub out her work of yesterday, was doing far less well than usual.

Suddenly the door of the studio was flung open, and to the astonishment of every one, Professor Forde appeared.

It was not, as a rule, his custom to visit the school two days in succession. On seeing him therefore, so unexpectedly, all the girls, as they expressed it, felt in a flutter.

Catalina's heart, which had been lying so heavy within her, began to beat quickly, the tears were hastily dried on her cheeks, a rose bloom came into each of her pale cheeks, and immediately her little face became one of the most piquant and charming in the entire school.

Professor Forde happened to glance at her as he came into the room; immediately, with two strides, he found himself bending over her easel.

‘Ha! what is this?’ he said. ‘You have been rubbing out your work; did you begin this drawing to-day?’

‘No,’ answered Catalina, ‘I began it yesterday.’

‘Why did you rub it out—was it bad?’

‘No.’

‘Then you must have had a reason.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ answered Catalina.

All the students within reach were eagerly watching for her reply. Rhoda felt uncomfortable. The girl

next to Rhoda, and the girl beyond her again, knew perfectly well why poor Catalina was obliged to begin a fresh drawing.

‘Tell me why you rubbed out your drawing,’ repeated the Professor.

‘It doesn’t matter,’ answered Catalina.

‘I must know the reason.’

‘I could not get into exactly the same position to-day, but I am all right now; I am beginning a new outline.’

The Professor paused; he looked at the boar-hound, then at the cart-horse, then he glanced at Rhoda, and in a twinkling he guessed at Catalina’s difficulty.

‘You won’t make a good drawing of the dog from where you are now,’ he said; ‘why don’t you try the horse?’

‘Oh, I should like to,’ said Catalina, her eyes beginning to dance.

‘I am sure you will make a good sketch, but not from where you are now sitting. You are one of the youngest; come more to the front, Miss Gifford.—Miss Stanford, have the goodness to make room—go back farther; remember you are much taller than Miss Gifford.—Now, Miss Gifford, let me place your easel for you: you have a good view from here, have you not?’

‘Excellent, thank you a thousand times,’ said Catalina in her impulsive way.

‘Well, set to work with your outline; I’ll come back

in the course of the morning to see how you are managing.'

The Professor left Catalina, and went into the middle of the room.

'Students,' he called out, 'I wish to say a word with regard to the scholarship for next session.'

The other professors and masters immediately stopped their tasks of going from easel to easel. The girls suspended their labours: all eyes were fixed upon Professor Forde.

'You doubtless all know,' he began, 'that the scholarship which is to be competed for next session is now offered for the first time to the Randall School. I have been left a certain sum of money which I mean, year by year, to devote to this purpose. By the wish of the Founder, the scholarship is to be called after my name. I mention this to show that although you are not indebted to me for the valuable prize itself, yet I naturally take a very deep interest in it. The friend to whom you are really indebted wishes his name to be hidden; he has, however, instructed me with regard to certain conditions which I now wish to speak to you about. The subject of the scholarship will be posted on the walls of this school by this day week; the awards will be made known on the 5th of October. All drawings and paintings must be in my possession by the third week in August. I now come to the main points to be considered in the competitions. First, excellence of outline; second, the best anatomical

rendering of the subject; but above and beyond these points, the verdict of myself and my friend will be in favour of those drawings which show originality of treatment.'

The Professor paused for a moment, looking round at the eager faces.

'My friend is an original himself,' he continued, 'and on this point he is very firm. Education can do a great deal for you all; but I must here state firmly that without originality you can none of you ever hope to win distinction. There is not perhaps a poorer creature on the earth than the Art student without ambition. I want you all, girls of the Randall School, to be ambitious; not wrongfully so. I have nothing to do with the ambition which would trample on a fellow-student, which would do wrong to gain merit for itself; but I want you to have that sort of noble ambition which will think no effort too great, no study too arduous to reach its goal. There is, I am certain, not a single student in this room who has not at least a vague hope of becoming known to the world later on. It is distinctly right to have that hope: it may never be realised—doubtless, in most of your cases, it never will be realised; but it is right, it is a good and brave thing to have it. I want to encourage you all to have it; but once again I must repeat that none of you will ever be known outside your own circle, however good your technical knowledge may be, unless you possess the gift of originality. Now it is quite possible that

some of you may have this gift without knowing it; it is also possible that some of you may have it, and be afraid to exhibit it—originality sometimes shows itself in eccentricities, and there are many boys and girls who are much afraid of the ridicule which that calls forth. I beg of you all now, if you have it, to conquer this fear at once; I beg of each and all of you to try and discover if you have within you even a trace of the all-important gift of originality. Once again I wish to impress upon you that the scholarship will be given for the most original rendering of the subject, which I hope to set within the next few days.' Here the Professor paused; he looked from one eager, sparkling face to the other, then he took up his hat and left the room.

Immediately afterwards, Professor Johnson arrived, and the work of the morning proceeded busily.

At lunch time, Professor Forde's speech and the great subject of the scholarship were the sole topics of conversation.

Catty once again found herself sitting close to Lucy Gray, but Lucy was too busy arguing with another girl, to take much notice of her little companion. Catalina herself was only too glad to be silent; her heart was full; a vague but golden hope sustained her.

'Whatever I have not got, I believe I have got originality,' she murmured to herself. 'Oh, I know it—I feel that I have the gift within me. I am not going

to be ashamed of it, I am not going to be vain of it; but I will, yes, I will try, with all my heart and main, to win this great scholarship.'

She pressed her hand to her forehead as the thought swept through her eager little mind; the future seemed dazzling and bright; nothing at that moment was impossible to her.

The school presently resumed its work, and Catalina went home in the afternoon fagged, weary, ill-nourished, but sustained by the brilliant hope of winning the Forde prize.

'Now to work hard at this month's composition,' she said to herself, 'what a try I will have. It is absolutely necessary that I should do my very best on this occasion, for I must be mentioned once again in the honour list to enable me to compete for the Forde Scholarship.'

She entered the house.

Mrs Gifford had secured a servant, and the place looked less untidy and less deserted than it had done yesterday. As Catalina came in, she met Rose in the hall.

'Where is father?' she asked eagerly.

Rose replied with some tartness:

'I don't know, I am sure; I wish you would not rush into the house in that untidy fashion, Catty. Now do hurry upstairs and take off your things, and come down to tea; oh, and afterwards I want you to come to my room and help me. I am going to put fresh

trimmings on my hat, and new ruffles on my gray canvas dress.'

'Is that for to-morrow?' asked Catalina.

'Yes, of course.'

'Then you are really going?'

'Going? of course we are going. Didn't you hear the whole thing being arranged yesterday? Oh, I forgot you were the disagreeable little girl who tried to put a spoke in our enjoyment this morning. I am much obliged to you, Catty.'

'But, Rose, why do you misunderstand me? You know it was on account of father.'

'I presume, Catty, that mother knows more about father than you do; now, will you help me with my hat, or will you not?'

'Of course I will help you; I'll rush upstairs now if you'll let me pass, Rose; I must go to the study to see father.'

'Very well; don't be long. I'll be in my room in less than half an hour.'

Catalina dashed upstairs and opened the study door. To her surprise it was empty; the beloved figure was not at its accustomed desk.

'Where can he be?' she said to herself. She felt uneasy, she could scarcely tell why. It was no good lingering in the study, however; she ran up to her own room, took off her hat, smoothed her hair, washed her hands, and flew downstairs.

She found her mother, sisters, and brother in the

dining-room, busily engaged over their tea. The tea was a nondescript meal, something between tea and supper.

‘Come, Catty,’ said Mrs Gifford in a good-natured voice, ‘I daresay you are half dead, child; the day has been fearfully hot. I’ve kept a nice fresh egg for you, my love, and a piece of fried bacon. Come up into this corner near me; you look quite washed out.’

‘Yes, doesn’t she?’ said Agnes; ‘like a ha’p’orth of soap after a week’s washing. Catty, you are all eyes; you won’t be the beauty people prophesy, if you don’t take more care of yourself.’

‘You don’t suppose you will influence Catty with those kind of remarks’ said Rose; ‘she thinks of nothing but Art. Oh, I see Catty in the future; those awful aesthetic dresses and that untidy hair, and you know, Agnes, that terrible kind of absent-minded look; oh dear, dear! I, at least, am not in love with the Art student.’

‘Well, children, don’t tease her now,’ said the mother. She was really startled at the look of fatigue on Catalina’s small face, and at the black shadows under her eyes.

‘Sit close to me, darling, and have a good meal,’ she said.

‘Thank you, mummy, I am *very* thirsty,’ said Catalina.

She drank off a cup of tea, and then said eagerly:

‘I could not find father in his study.’ She turned to her mother as she spoke.

Mrs Gifford laughed.

‘Do you think I have hidden him anywhere, my love?’ she asked.

‘Oh mummy, you know what I mean.’

‘I really don’t, Catty. If there is a person who is absolutely his own master, it is the Professor; and if he does not choose to be in the study sharp at half-past five, I am afraid I can neither make nor mar in the matter.’

‘I wonder if he has had his tea,’ said Catty.

‘I cannot tell you, my dear; I have not been in myself more than twenty minutes. Oh, I have had such a killing day, I really felt fit to drop when I entered this house.—Teddy, pass the lobster paste, thank you, love.—What was I telling you, Catty? Oh yes, I remember; I went to *ten* registry-offices before I could get the new maid, and she is only here as a stop-gap. She has got a permanent place which she must enter in about a fortnight. I suppose we’re lucky to have her; we could not have done another day with only Alice.’

‘Mother, may I run and speak to Alice?’ said Catalina.

‘What do you want with her?’

‘She would be able to tell me if father has had his tea.’

‘Really, Catty, you are enough to distract any one

with your fusses and your groans over the Professor. What good will it do you to know whether he has had a cup of tea or not? When he really wants it, I suppose he'll ask for it. Now, my dears, I wish to say one thing to you all—there is a new servant in the house. By the way, her name is Matilda, and we must all try to keep some sort of order if we wish to keep her. Oh yes, I know she is going in a fortnight; but if we want her to stay, even for that short time, we must be very considerate and very obliging about everything. Dear, dear! what a state the world has come to! Servants now think so highly of themselves that one has to look upon them as superior beings. Girls, remember you are not to ring the bell oftener than you can help, you are never to ask Matilda to do a single thing out of her ordinary work, you are to fetch and carry for yourselves, and, in short, make yourselves generally useful. Matilda did condescend to lay the table this evening, and I suppose in the course of time she will condescend also to take the things away, and perhaps to wash them up and put them in order; but listen to me, girls, and you also, Teddy—you must all remember what I am saying—she must not be bothered. If she is, she will go off as Jane did.'

‘What a pity she has come,’ said Catalina.

‘She is worse than a visitor,’ said Teddy.

‘Now don’t be silly, either of you,’ said the mother; ‘she is just a present-day servant, and you know what those sort of people are.’

‘Well, at any rate, it is a good thing to have her,’ said Rose with a yawn. ‘I suppose she’ll do her ordinary work, and I do so hate having to put my hand to anything of the sort. She may manage as she pleases, provided she does out our bedrooms in the morning, and dusts the house, and attends at table. And, oh mother, do you think to-morrow will be fine?’

‘It gives every promise of it, love.’

‘They said at school there was going to be a thunder-storm,’ broke from Teddy’s lips. ‘A thunder-storm generally breaks up the weather,’ he continued, looking with marked interest at Agnes as he spoke.

‘Little boys should be seen, and not heard,’ was Agnes’s sharp retort. ‘Mother, I shall wear my gray canvas,’ she continued, ‘and my hat with the blush roses.’

‘Of course you will, and very nice you will look,’ said Rose.

Agnes simpered, and the delicate colour bloomed more brightly in her pretty cheeks. She glanced at Catalina, who had not heard Rose’s compliment; she was devouring her own tea with rapidity. She was very hungry, and knew that this was her only chance of satisfying her appetite that night; but all the time she ate, a dull fear rested on her heart in connection with her father.

CHAPTER VI.

FATHER AND CHILD.



JUST when tea was over, Mr Gifford's latchkey was heard in the front door.

‘There he comes,’ said Catalina; she coloured, uttered a sigh of relief, and rushed into the hall.

‘How late you are, father?’ she cried.

‘Is it late?’ asked the Professor. ‘Why, what is the hour?’

‘Half-past six. Have you had any tea?’

‘Tea? I really don’t remember; I don’t think I have.’

Mrs Gifford had followed her daughter into the hall.

‘You had better come right in here, and have a cup now, John,’ she said, putting her hand on her husband’s arm. ‘My dear, of course you have not had any; I doubt if you have touched a morsel of food since lunch. Come in at once; there’s some tea still left in the pot.’

‘Had not we better make some fresh tea, mother?’ said Catalina.

‘No; what is in the teapot will do admirably.’

‘Admirably,’ repeated the Professor. He followed his wife into the close and noisy dining-room. A chair was found for him opposite the one in which Catalina had seated herself. She looked across at him longingly; her impulse was to rush off to the kitchen and bring him in fresh toast and a temptingly prepared tea. Tears were very near her eyes, but she kept them back. A glance showed her that her father was more than tired; there was a weary inertia about him which the little girl saw plainly, but which no one else noticed. He drank off several cups of tea and ate a small piece of bread and butter, but he put aside the potted lobster and the eggs which his wife offered to him.

‘I am not hungry,’ he repeated.—‘Yes, another cup of tea, my love.’

As he was drinking this he looked in a bewildered way at his wife.

‘I cannot quite remember, Rose,’ he said, ‘whether this is breakfast or supper.’

The younger Rose burst into a gay laugh.

‘You really are too bad, father,’ she said. He looked at her, raising his brows, then he passed his hand across his forehead.

‘But which is it, really?’ he asked.

‘Oh, tea, tea,’ said Agnes, choking also with laughter. ‘Really, father, that is quite the most killing thing you ever said.’

‘I am glad it amuses you, my dear,’ he replied gravely.

Soon afterwards he left his seat, and going to the hearthrug, stood there looking down the room.

‘Well, Rose,’ he said, glancing at his wife, ‘we have much to be thankful for, have we not?’

‘Of course, dear,’ she replied. His remark seemed to puzzle her; she looked up at him. ‘Are you well, John?’ she asked suddenly.

Catalina’s heart gave a leap of thankfulness. If her mother noticed that her father was not quite well, something might be done for him. It was on the tip of her tongue to say something about the doctor being sent for, but the Professor’s next words arrested the unformed words.

‘I am quite well,’ he replied; ‘I never felt better in the whole course of my life. I can truly say that I have not an ache nor a pain in the world—no; and for that matter, I have not a care either. I am blessed with the best of wives, and with four very beautiful children.—Come here, my children; kiss me.’

Rose and Agnes, after a moment’s amazed pause, went up to their father. He put his hand on each of their heads.

‘You are the eldest, Agnes, are you not?’ he said, looking into her pretty face.

‘Of course, father,’ she answered, trying to make her tone flippant.

‘I remember you were my first child,’ he said. ‘I

was a very happy man when the Almighty gave you to me, my dear; I am a happy man to-night.' He kissed her very tenderly on her forehead, then he kissed Rose, then Catalina, then little Edward.

'The Benjamin,' he said, as he put his hand on the little fellow's dark, curly hair, 'the Benjamin of the family, and the only boy, bless thee, little lad.'

With these last words, the Professor went slowly down the room, opened the door and closed it after him.

'What can be the matter?' said Rose, turning a little pale.

'Oh, cannot you see for yourself,' said Catalina, the tears now really springing to her eyes, 'cannot you see for yourselves that father is not a bit well? He would not have gone on in that strange way if he were well.'

'Now listen to me, Catalina,' said her mother: 'your ways and manner and nervous fears are enough to upset anybody. Let me tell you once for all that there is nothing whatever the matter with your father. Has he not said so himself? My dear children, the Professor is just a genius, and the ways of geniuses are never to be calculated upon. He is the best man in the world, but he is a bookworm and a genius, and such folks are not to be judged by ordinary standards. My dear children, all of you, it is twenty years since I married the Professor; I presume therefore that I have a right to know more

about him than any of the rest of you. He is the best of men, the kindest, the most unselfish, but he is a genius; therefore, the little scene he has just enacted for your benefit, my children, is quite in character. I repeat, once for all, that there is nothing in what he just said to make any of you anxious.'

'But, mother, you asked him yourself if he were well,' interrupted Catalina.

Mrs Gifford's face slightly reddened.

'His manner startled me for a moment,' she said, 'and I just forgot that he was the Professor. When I remembered that fact, of course I felt all right. Now pray, my dears, don't moon about in this room any longer, or we shall have Matilda in a huff. I daresay you two girls,' she glanced at Rose and Agnes as she spoke, 'have small odds and ends to do before to-morrow's picnic.'

'Yes, mother, that we have,' said Rose. 'Come along, Aggie.—Catalina, don't forget your promise.'

'No, I'll be with you in a minute,' answered Catalina.

The elder girls and their mother left the room. Catalina and Teddy remained behind.

'What are you frightened about?' asked the little boy, going up to his sister as he spoke.

Catalina went on her knees, and put her arms round her brother's neck.

'Teddy,' she said, after a pause, 'there's a weight at my heart; I can't understand it, Ted, but it is there.'



There was an attic which Catalina had all to herself at the very top of the house.

Cat.

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She clasped the child tightly to her heart, kissed him so frantically that he very nearly cried out, and then ran from the room.

There was an attic which Catalina had all to herself at the very top of the house. It contained nothing but old boxes and a few treasures of the little girl's very own; there was an easel in a corner, a very disreputable-looking lay figure, some brushes, and a palette with a half-done drawing upon it. It was in this spot that Catalina meant to work away at her composition by-and-by, it was in this corner she hoped to try for the great Forde Scholarship. She flew to her attic now, shut and bolted the door, and remained there with her own anxious beating heart, her own rebellious thoughts, for a few minutes. There came a tap at the door; Rose was frantically turning the handle.

'Come, Catty, remember your promise,' she called through the keyhole.

'I'll come soon, very soon,' answered Catalina. She suddenly flung herself on her knees, covered her face, murmured some words rapidly, as if she were imploring the help of some one very hard indeed; then she unbolted the door, and ran down to the room which she shared with Rose.

'Now I am ready to help you,' she said.

Rose was standing by her bed; she was unpicking some rather dirty flowers from a white hat.

'I am glad to see you, Catty,' she said. 'Here, jump

on the bed ; it is the only vacant seat left. Take this hat, will you ? and, oh yes, this clothes-brush ; I want you to unpick the ribbons and brush them out. See, I bought these plush roses to-day ; don't they look sweet ?'

' Pretty well,' said Catalina.

' Why do you say that ? Don't you like them ?'

' They don't look very natural.'

' Well, I think they do ; anyhow, they were the very best I could buy ; you know we are not rich.'

' I daresay they will look all right when they are in the hat,' said Catalina.

' Yes, I am sure they will. I wish you would fix them up for me, Catty. You know you have got a wonderful touch, when you like.'

Catalina smiled faintly.

' These sort of roses grow in clusters,' she said, after a pause. ' I know the kind very well ; they covered the front of the cottage down at Hazlemere when we were there last year.'

' What does that matter now ? I want them stuck in my hat.'

' Yes, but I am trying to think how I shall arrange them ; it would be best not to separate them. I'll put them altogether just in one big bunch at this side.'

' Yes, that is quite charming,' said Rose, standing over her. ' I declare my hat will be much prettier than Agnes's, although Agnes's is quite new. She bought hers trimmed in the shop ; it took every scrap

of her money. The roses are put in separately, one here and one there; the cluster is much more effective.'

'I won't put this faded ribbon in any more,' said Catalina; 'have you got some black lace?'

'Only my lace scarf.'

'Well, give me that; I can make you up a beautiful hat with these roses and some black lace; have you a box of pins? Come, that is right.'

'But will the black lace look well with the roses?'

'Of course, just under them, so. Now they stand out, don't they?'

'I declare they do, splendidly.' Rose clapped her hands with delight. 'My dear Catty, you are a born genius.'

Catalina became now intensely interested in her work, the roses in her cheeks almost matched the roses in the hat; she screwed up her pretty lips, and inclined her head sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, to survey her handiwork.

'I think that will do,' she said at last.

'Do,' said Rose; 'why, it's perfect; the hat looks every bit as well as any hat in Regent Street. Catty, you ought to be a milliner.'

'I like making things look pretty,' said Catalina.

'How queer you are. I heard you flying out the other day because some one had done a pretty drawing.'

'Oh! but, Rose, that is something quite different.'

'Is it? I'm sure I don't know; anyhow, you have

managed this nicely for me. Now can you ruffle the lace round the neck of my dress ?'

' Give it to me,' said Catalina ; she began to quilt the soft lace up, and then fastened it round the neck of the dress with long tacking threads.

' But, child, all that work will come out.'

' Well, you must sew it over when I have finished. I cannot do needlework ; I can just bunch the lace into position.'

' So you can, and it looks charming. Now what gave you that quaint idea, I wonder ; I never saw lace exactly arranged like this. I know it will suit me to perfection ; why did you think of it, Catty ? '

' I didn't think of it—I saw it,' said Catalina. ' Don't you remember that picture of Madame Le Brun done by herself ? cannot you recall the way the neck of the dress is arranged, and the way the lace falls ? I have only copied that.'

' Is that so ? How clever of you to think of it ! Certainly the dress will look just as if out of an old picture ; and with that hat ! Oh, I shall have a charming day ! ' Rose began to skip about the room. ' I do hope it will be fine,' she added, gazing up at the summer sky anxiously.

' I am glad you like it all, Rose. Now have I done enough for you ? '

' I suppose you have, you poor dear child ; has it been very troublesome ? '

' No, not at all ; but I want to go to father.'

‘Catty, you really need not be anxious about him. You ought to trust to what mother says; remember she has known him for twenty years.’

Catalina sighed.

‘At any rate I should like to go to him now,’ she said. She left the room and flew downstairs.

She entered the study without knocking. The Professor was seated just as he had been the night before; he was bending over his desk just as usual. A pile of dictionaries lay near him at his right hand; a lot of manuscript paper was scattered about; he was bending forward, his pen in his hand.

‘Is that you, Catalina?’ he said, without looking up.

‘Yes,’ she replied; ‘what are you doing, father?’

‘Preparing my Hebrew lecture. There is very little time left.’

‘But, father’—Catalina felt as if a hand had suddenly clutched at her heart—‘father, don’t you remember?’ she repeated.

‘What is the matter, Catty?’ He paused now, and looked up at her. ‘I had no idea it was so late,’ he said. ‘I am to deliver that lecture to-night at eight o’clock.’

‘But, father, you are quite forgetting about everything; you delivered your *last* lecture last night at six o’clock; cannot you remember? The course of Hebrew lectures is over.’

He looked at her steadily for a moment, then his lips parted with the faint dawn of a smile.

'I believe you are right,' he said; 'how queer that I should have absolutely forgotten.'

With a great effort Catty began to speak in a cheerful tone.

'So you need not worry about that work,' she said. 'Now do let me put all the papers away.'

He did not utter another word. She collected the sheets of manuscript paper, and put them into a drawer out of sight, then she placed the dictionaries back on the book-shelves, and finally drawing a small stool close to the Professor, sat down, and rested her arm on his knee. He lay back in his chair very quiet, and strangely silent. He was at no time a man of many words, but when he and Catalina were alone, it was often his habit to talk to her as if she were a man; to talk all about the subjects which filled his own heart and soul. The sun sent its last rays in at the window; there was a very red sunset, and a bank of heavy clouds was coming up slowly in the south-west.

'There will be a storm,' said Catalina. 'The clouds are coming up against the wind; Teddy is quite right.'

The Professor did not reply. Catalina began to stroke his long thin hand; suddenly she bent forward, and pressed her lips passionately to his fingers. The Professor very slowly moved his hand; he laid it on her head.

'I enjoy sitting still,' he said, after a pause; 'I enjoy having you with me. The evening time is a very peaceful part of the day.'

‘Yes, father.’

He leant back again in his chair, then closed his eyes, while a sigh, the faintest of sighs, came from his lips. Catalina sat perfectly quiet for several minutes, then she turned round, and gazed anxiously into her father’s face. She had never seen it look so gray, so old; the cheeks seemed to have fallen in; the thin, intellectual lips were shut almost in a straight line; the eyes, full of a dreamy content, were fixed upon the rays of the setting sun.

‘Oh father,’ said Catalina, suddenly springing to her feet, ‘I feel at times nearly mad with longing.’

A frown came between the Professor’s brows; he looked up at her with astonishment.

‘There is no use in that sort of thing, my little girl,’ he said; ‘in this world, excessive emotion is wasted.’

‘But all the same you cannot help feeling it—that is, when you are young, young like me,’ she said; she panted as she spoke.

‘You are exactly like my mother, Catalina. She, too, was excitable; a fervid temperament, a great warm heart. You take after her. I am glad you are like her, my little girl.’

‘Was she excitable when she was old, father?’

‘Yes, to the very end. Now as for me, it would take a great deal to rouse me, to rouse me to your sort of excitement, Catty.’

‘But, father, that is just it; you ought to be roused,

you want rousing. I wish I were rich; I wish for all sorts of impossible things. I should like you to take me away, and I to take you away into a beautiful part of the country.'

'But I prefer the town, my dear; there are more books in town. I am happier at the Burlington Museum than in any other place in the world. What is the matter with you to-night, Catty? Is anything troubling you?'

'I am troubled about you. I do not believe you are well; you are not like yourself.'

'I assure you, my love, I am quite well; not even tired.'

'Why did you come home a whole hour later than usual?'

'I will tell you, Catty,' he said, after a pause; 'I forgot all about the time. I stayed in my room in the museum after the place had been closed; one of the clerks came and reminded me.'

'It is so queer of you to forget things,' said Catalina. 'That is not the only thing you have forgotten to-day: you came home late; and afterwards you began to prepare your Hebrew lecture. It is all strange,' she added, 'and it frightens me.'

The Professor rose suddenly to his feet.

'There is a weight here,' he said, pressing his hand to his forehead; 'something comes between me and—and the world.' He looked wildly at Catalina for a moment, then he sat down again.

‘Let me call mother, let me send for the doctor,’ said the child.

‘Don’t speak for a moment; it is a cloud, but it will pass.’ The Professor seemed to struggle with himself, then the calm returned to his face.

‘It was a horrid sensation, but it has gone,’ he said. ‘There was something inexplicable between you and me, between me and the whole world; but it has gone by: I am quite myself once more. Don’t on any account call your mother, my love; I would not have her alarmed: there is nothing serious the matter.’

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAUREL CROWN OF FAME.



HE storm must have spent itself elsewhere, for the next morning arose in great brilliance and glory. Catalina again got up early, went downstairs to the kitchen, braved Alice's ill-concealed displeasure, and the wondering glances of the new maid, Matilda, and brought up sharp at seven a temptingly prepared little breakfast to her father.

As usual, the Professor was up; he always rose soon after five in the summer, and an hour later in the winter. This morning he was seated at his desk, bending forward and busily writing in his somewhat cramped, upright hand. There was a faint flush on his otherwise deadly pale face. In Catalina's eyes that flush made him look much better. Her spirits rose when she saw him; she placed the breakfast on a little table by his side, and skipped about the room, putting it in order while he ate; she drew up the blinds at both the windows, and opening the sashes, let in the sweet, fresh morning air. Mr Gifford ate

his nicely prepared breakfast with appetite. He smiled now and then as he saw Catalina moving about; her bright movements seemed to soothe and please him.

‘What it is to be young and in good spirits,’ he said. ‘Come here, Catty.’

She went up to him at once, and dropped on her knees by his side. Her earnest, *spirituelle*, little face was raised to his; he looked into it intently.

‘A penny for your thoughts,’ he said.

‘Oh, I have so many,’ she answered; ‘just at the present moment I dream of the laurel crown of fame, for you and for me.’

‘Dear child,’ he answered, ‘I shall never have anything to do with that crown.’

‘Well, father, I hope *I* shall wear it; I wish to tell you, father—I don’t mind you knowing my very innermost thoughts—that I have made up my mind to have it some day.’

The Professor smiled.

‘How excitable you are, Catty,’ he said; ‘the crown of Fame, the wreath of Bay. Long ago I used to dream of such glories; but now I don’t think they are worth the struggle. The wreath of bay withers, little Catalina; it does not last. No earthly glory is worth the struggle we make for it when we are young.’

‘So it seems to you,’ she replied, ‘but not to me; you cannot crush the hope out of me, father. Some day I am going to be famous.’

‘You mean to be a great painter, eh, little girl?’ he asked tenderly.

‘Yes.’ There was a world of expression in Catalina’s ‘Yes.’

‘How do you know that you have it in you?’

‘I believe I have.’ She said the last words so low that they were scarcely heard. There was intense emotion, but no vanity in her words; she hung her pretty head. With a quick movement her father put his arms round her neck, then she laid her bright face on his shoulder.

‘God bless you,’ he said: ‘you are like none of the others; you are like me when I was young, and yet with a difference. If ever you come to my years, Catalina, you will look at all this from a different point of view. Well, never mind; old eyes cannot see as young eyes. My vanishing point is there’—he raised his arm and pointed upward with his finger—‘yours here; different standpoints, eh? So you think fame and glory the best of all?’

‘What can be better?’ she asked. Her heart was beating high.

‘The crown of bay and the laurel wreath both wither,’ said the Professor very slowly, ‘but the crown of goodness, that remains. After all, child, at the end of a long life, I may say from the bottom of my heart, that the only thing really worth living for is goodness. Be good, Catalina, conquer yourself; there is nothing else worth living for in the long run.’

The Professor rose as he spoke.

‘I must be off,’ he said; ‘you have kept me too long chattering.’

‘But you don’t go to the museum so early, as a rule.’

‘I must this morning. I have to deliver a Persian lecture in the south room, and must make some important notes on the spot. Don’t keep me, my dear child.’

‘Well, at any rate, you won’t forget that it is Saturday, and that you have got to be back in time for high tea with me; you and I will be alone at tea, for mother and the girls are going on the Thames, and Teddy has an invitation to spend the rest of the day out. Don’t forget to be home in time.’

‘I won’t, my darling.’

Mr Gifford seized some papers, rolled them up, thrust his glasses into his pocket, and abruptly left the room. Catalina stood for a moment where he had left her.

‘I suppose, in one sense, the crown of goodness is the best,’ she whispered slowly to herself, ‘but—but I want the other.’ She raised herself on tiptoe to look at her own reflection in the overmantel; she saw a little dark face, with some colour in it, eyes sparkling with excitement, the freshness of the early morning all over the piquant, excitable little face. She put up her hand to her head.

‘Just here I shall wear it,’ she whispered—‘invisible,

of course, but yet visible, and it all depends upon whether I win the scholarship. Now then to work, to work hard. Good-bye, dreams. You are worth nothing unless you incite me to work. What a busy time I have before me! I must finish my cart-horse this morning; then this afternoon, if all goes well, I'll sketch in my rough idea of "A Vision of the Night." They will all be away at the picnic, and father and I can have a real, cosy time. After dinner, perhaps, he will come with me to the Zoo; oh, we are in for a comfortable afternoon.'

She flew downstairs. Matilda was rather glad of the help she volunteered, and breakfast was laid punctually on the table. The freshness of the day—for a delicious breeze was blowing from the south-west—and the pleasant anticipation of coming enjoyment, made both Agnes and Rose inclined to be specially agreeable. Mrs Gifford had slept well, and was also pleased at the prospect of the long, happy day which lay before her.

'I hope to goodness the champagne will be worth drinking,' she said, as she poured herself out a cup of tea.

'Mother, don't forget to bring our subscriptions,' said Rose.

'No, my dear. Alas! the subscription is the thorn in the pillow, the crumpled rose-leaf. How much did Mrs Maxwell say it would be?'

'Well, not more than £1 a head,' answered

Rose. 'Very cheap I call it. You know we are to have a steam-launch; that is much more satisfactory than a rowing boat.'

'Not so romantic,' said Agnes. 'However, never mind; nothing shall damp the delights of this day.'

'I wish Catty was coming with us,' said her mother; 'that child really grows paler and paler.'

'I am in perfect health,' answered Catalina; 'it is natural to me to be pale.'

'You know, mother, that Catalina would much rather be at school,' said Rose.

'Oh, you need not tell us that, my love,' said the mother.—'Well, see here, Catty, you shall have a nice lunch to-day. Give me that bread and butter: I'll put the rest of this lobster paste on it; and here's a basket of strawberries for you, Catty.'

'You are in luck, Catty,' said Agnes, with an envious glance at the fresh, cool fruit.

'Don't be greedy, Agnes,' said her mother; 'the child shall have this basket of fruit; the rest of us are going off for a bit of fun, and she is staying at home.'

'No, she is going to school; she is going to do what she likes best of all.'

'Well, she is a good child, and a pattern to us all,' said her mother. 'Now run off, my love, and work to your heart's content. By-the-way, you saw your father, did you not?'

'Yes, I took him his breakfast at seven o'clock.'

'Good gracious! why at that hour?' laughed Rose.

‘He is to have it at that hour every morning,’ said Catalina, in a determined voice.

‘How did he seem to-day?’ asked the mother.

‘Pretty well, mother; he was in a great hurry to get off to the museum. He said he had to give a lecture on Persian in the course of the morning.’

‘Now that’s odd,’ said Mrs Gifford; ‘I thought all the lectures were over. What does he mean? Well, I shall be quite glad when the term is finished; the Professor really wants rest.’

Mrs Gifford hurried from the breakfast-table to continue her preparations for the great event of the day, and Catalina went to school.

She found herself once more seated next Rhoda Stanford, and once again owned to a sense of irritation at this arrangement. Catalina had done remarkably good work the day before. Her outline of the cart-horse had been admirable, and had called forth the rather warm eulogiums of Professor Forde. He not only praised the accuracy of her drawing, but had shown Rhoda Stanford the difference between Catalina’s spirited drawing of the horse, and her own lame and weak rendering.

‘See,’ he had said to her, ‘Miss Gifford’s horse is all alive with movement; you can almost see him dance. Your horse! can’t you see for yourself that it is wooden?’

Rhoda’s face had flushed, and her hatred of Catalina had grown stronger.

When the little girl entered now, Rhoda did not even look up. Catalina resolved to take no notice of her. She put her easel quickly into position, and continued her delightful work of yesterday; she had to shade her copy of the cart-horse this morning.

At the Saturday lunch, many girls stayed in the studio, and amongst them this morning was Rhoda. She went to the cloak-room, and bringing back a neat little case, took out some daintily prepared sandwiches; she then filled up a glass of sherry from a silver flask. Sipping her sherry daintily, and jingling her heavy gold bangles, she looked the essence of pretentious girlhood; she belonged, in short, to the worst class of her type, possessing all the smallnesses of her sex, and few of their redeeming qualities.

Catalina found a nook for herself by Margaret Ashton; she was glad to put as great a distance between herself and Rhoda as possible.

‘Well, Catty,’ said Margaret, ‘have you begun the composition?’

‘No, but I mean to to-day,’ answered Catty.

‘You don’t mean to say,’ called Rhoda suddenly, across the room, ‘that a little mite like you has the audacity to try that difficult competition, “A Vision of the Night?”’

‘Yes,’ replied Catalina, nodding; she lowered her long eye-lashes as she spoke.

‘Catalina, I envy you those delicious strawberries,’

said Margaret Ashton, leaning affectionately towards the child; 'do let me share them.'

'Oh, please do, Maggie; I am so delighted that you wish for them,' said Catty, flushing now with pleasure.

'Never mind what that tiresome thing says,' continued Margaret in a whisper; 'her opinions are worth nothing.'

'Please, Margaret, don't encourage me to hate her.'

'To hate her! What can you mean, silly child?'

'I cannot tell you what I feel; I must not say it now.'

Rhoda began to talk to another girl who stood near. Suddenly the studio door was opened, and Lucy Gray, who had gone across to the restaurant for lunch, came in. She stood up before the other girls, and said:

'What do you think has happened?' Her tone was full of excitement.

'No! What? Do tell us,' cried several.

'Well, there's no end of a fuss. I heard full particulars from Persis Rowton. Some daring busybody has been scribbling caricatures on three of the masters' easels, Professor Forde's, Professor Johnson's, and Mr Fortescue's. The caricatures were discovered this morning. Persis says they are the most ridiculous things you can imagine, heaps of go in them and talent, but really quite insulting. Who ever has done them has hit off the masters to the very life. She tells me Professor Forde has been done inimitably;

I could not help laughing even at her description. He was taken in this sort of attitude'— Here Lucy held up her right hand, slightly elongated her round face, and narrowed her eyes.

' You know that special look, don't you, girls?' she continued—' the look he gives to an unfortunate student's production before he means to pounce upon it. Well, there he was in his pouncing attitude, and lower down on the easel in his lecturing attitude, and in another corner in the attitude when he is too disgusted even to speak. Persis said it was about the cleverest and the cruellest thing she ever saw in her life. Oh, mean! of course it was shockingly mean, and all the rest. As to poor Mr Fortescue, you know the timid darling? Well, he has been represented in such a way, and all his dear little foibles so plainly manifested, that I should scarcely think he would have the face to show himself in the studio again. Professor Johnson was also hit to the life, and made slightly fatter than usual. Persis says that the professors are consulting over the matter, and she is told that on Monday there is going to be a regular row. The masters are determined to trace the guilty person home. Who can possibly have done it?'

' I do wish I could see the easels,' said Catalina, jumping to her feet.

' Why, Catty, how absurdly eager you look,' said Margaret.

' Of course I am; I love clever caricatures.'

‘Can you caricature?’ asked Lucy.

‘At one time I had quite a fit of it, but father said it was a dangerous gift, so I only indulge in it now and then quite in private.’

‘It seems scarcely fair to question Miss Gifford at this moment,’ said Rhoda Stanford, coming forward. Her voice took a disagreeable tone, and there was a sly look in her light green eyes. ‘Miss Gifford may commit herself,’ she added; ‘the disgraceful proceeding may be brought home to her.’

Catty looked full at Rhoda when she said this; her clear eyes laughed. She sat calmly down again, and taking up another sandwich, proceeded placidly with her lunch.

‘I call the whole thing disgraceful,’ said Margaret.

‘It is simply scandalous,’ said Lucy. ‘Poor Professor Johnson is in the greatest rage of all; he can stand anything except being turned into ridicule. Well, the guilty person will get it hot; they say she is certain to be expelled.’

‘I cannot imagine when the opportunity occurred,’ said Margaret.

‘Yes, that is one of the puzzles. We are to be questioned closely on Monday. If the guilty person does not confess, the whole of the school is to be sent to Coventry. Oh, I am certain it is going to be very disagreeable, and the worst of it is, that any one who could do a mean trick of that sort, would not hesitate to conceal it with a lie. However, the professors mean

to be very sharp, and will not leave a stone unturned to trace the culprit.'

'I am going back to my work now, Margaret,' said Catty; 'I want to finish shading the cart-horse before I go home.'

'Have you begun to shade it so soon?'

'Yes, I finished the outline yesterday.'

'Catty got a lot of praise for her outline, don't you remember, Margaret?' said Lucy.

'Of course I do now—some of Professor Forde's rare words of commendation. The little professor is getting on with strides and bounds. I should not wonder, Catty, if they put you into colour next term.'

'I do hope they will,' replied Catty with a beaming face. She returned to her easel, but the others stood together in clusters, talking of the event of the hour. The most eager in the discussion was Rhoda Stanford.

'Who can the guilty person be?' she kept on repeating. 'Who had the opportunity of doing such a clever and daring trick?'

The other girls shook their heads; they could find no answer to Rhoda's questions.

'Well, for the first time in my entire life, I am positively glad I am not clever,' proceeded Rhoda. 'If I were, the cruel trick might be brought home to me, for you know, all of you, that the professors cannot bear me, and half of you girls are rude enough to think badly of me.'

'We none of us think so badly of you as that,' said

a little red-haired girl, who stood near. 'For my part,' she added, flushing deeply, 'I don't believe a girl in the whole school would wilfully insult our dear professors.'

'Well, some one has done it, that is an obvious fact,' replied Rhoda; then she added, lowering her voice, 'We all know the girl who has got the ability; she confessed that much herself.'

'To whom do you allude?' asked Margaret, in a firm voice.

'Oh, I won't breathe her name,' said Rhoda. 'Of course she has not done it; she is far too perfect. I only allude to the obvious fact that she has got the ability.'

'Your remarks are extremely unkind,' said Margaret, her eyes flashing. 'If there is a girl to whom such an act of deceit would be impossible, it is the one to whom you allude.'

Rhoda tossed her head.

'Appearances have deceived before now,' she said. She then went back to her own seat.

The professors returned, and the girls continued their work. The clock at the end of the room calmly ticked away the last hour of the Art school week. Catty, in the absorbing interest of her own work, forgot all about the subject which was exciting so much attention in the school. Not so Rhoda. Rhoda was restless and excited, a little nervous too, had any one sufficient leisure to observe her. Her work

had never interested her less than this afternoon. She was doing it badly, and each stroke but added to her difficulties. Even to herself, she could not but own that her copy of the cart-horse was ungainly, knock-kneed, wooden, and shaky. She glanced once or twice with keen envy at Catalina. How boldly Catalina's horse stood out on her paper, how alive it was, how telling were each of her firm strokes. Where had she learned to manage her charcoal as she did? Why did each line but add to the bold effect of her drawing? Yes, Rhoda had to acknowledge that Catty's horse was an excellent copy, whereas hers was feeble, hopeless. Yes, there was no doubt of the truth—Catty had strength, and Rhoda feebleness.

‘How dreadful it all is,’ thought the angry girl, ‘how hateful! Why should one girl have so much and another so little?’

With all the bitterness of a weak nature, Rhoda hated Catalina at that moment.

Another student came up, and stood close to Rhoda's easel.

‘I feel quite nervous about Monday morning,’ she said. ‘The professors are in a fury; they are determined to trace the caricatures home. If the guilty girl does not confess, all the students in our school are to be put into Coventry.’

‘I wonder what that will mean,’ said Rhoda.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

'Everything disagreeable,' she answered; 'of course the scholarship will be withdrawn.'

'Nonsense! That would be too bad.'

'It will be hard, certainly,' said the girl, 'and I for one have been making such efforts, and really have the ghost of a sort of hope of success. If only the guilty person would confess.'

'It must be brought home to her whether she confesses or not,' said Rhoda, with a meaning smile; she bent again over her drawing.

'You are not making much of that,' said her companion.

'No, animals are not at all in my line; I think I shall give them up, and take to flowers.'

'Any one can paint flowers.'

'I don't agree with you. At any rate, whether I am ever to paint or not, I am going now.'

She stood up, yawning as she spoke. At that moment she made a sudden lunge forward, and contrived to give Catalina's easel an intentional push. In consequence, the little girl made an uncertain stroke just at an important part of her work. She looked up at Rhoda with flashing, angry eyes.

'I do wish you would be careful, Rhoda,' she said.

'No talking, young ladies,' said Mr Fortescue's voice in the distance. Rhoda gave a vindictive smile, and the next moment had left the studio. She went into the dressing-room, which happened to be empty. Catty's little string-bag was hanging on the wall; it

hung limp, and was nearly empty, containing nothing except a drawing-book and one or two odds and ends of drawing-paper. Rhoda looked hastily round her.

‘I’ll risk it,’ she reflected. ‘This matter is going to be much more troublesome than I had the least idea of. I would never have got myself into this scrape if I had but known; well, there is no other way out of it, and it will serve her right too, for, but for her, it could not have been done. I shall have my revenge, and also save myself.’

She put her hand into her pocket, and taking out a half sheet of paper on which several caricatures of the different masters were drawn in pen and ink in a spirited manner, slipped it into Catalina’s bag.

‘There,’ she thought, ‘if this does not startle her, I don’t know what will. I wonder how she will manage now, and what she will do; anyhow, I shall be all right.’

Rhoda hastily pinned her hat over her frowzy head of hair, and left the school.

The clock was pointing to ten minutes to three, when one of the Art students came up to Catalina, and spoke to her.

‘You are Catty Gifford, are you not?’ she said.

‘Yes,’ replied Catty.

‘Well, there is some one outside who wants to speak to you.’

‘Some one who wants to speak to me?’ repeated Catalina in surprise.

‘Yes, she looks like a servant. She is waiting just outside the studio; she seems in a hurry.’

Catalina sprang from her seat, and ran hastily out of the studio. In the passage outside she came plump up against Alice.

‘Oh, Miss Catty,’ said the girl, ‘I thought I’d best come and fetch you at once. Even a few minutes may be of consequence, miss.’

‘Why, what is the matter, Alice? Has anything gone wrong?’

‘I don’t know exactly, miss. It’s the Professor; he’s a bit queer, and I’m rather frightened. I don’t think he’s well; he is walking up and down the dining-room, and talking queerly to himself. I heard him come in, and I’—

‘Don’t keep me, please,’ said Catalina, interrupting her; ‘I’ll just put on my hat, and fly home.’ She forgot all about her string-bag, her easel, everything in the wide world except the Professor. A moment later, she was rushing along Gabriel Street, panting as she ran. Oh that there were wings to her feet! Once she looked behind her. Alice away in the distance was also running, and calling to Catty to stop; but Catalina did not mind; she flew on faster and faster. How she wished that she had money in her pocket in order that she might call a passing hansom. The hansom driver put up his hand, but she was obliged to shake her head in reply. Her eager feet flew quicker and quicker over the dusty street. Fear kept tugging at her heart. Her

father, her beloved father; oh, what could be the matter! Oh, to reach him soon, soon! There was a pain in her side, her breath came hard, hurting her as she drew it. At last she reached her own hall door; she ran up the steps, and pulled the rickety bell. Matilda, the new maid, who was evidently waiting for her, opened the door at once.

‘Alice came to fetch me; where’s father?’ said Catty, with a gasp.

‘He has gone upstairs, miss; I think he’s in the drawing-room. We don’t quite know what is the matter. Oh! please, miss, don’t be so frightened; I daresay the Professor will be all right when he sees you.’

‘Let me pass, Matilda,’ panted Catty.

She ran upstairs, flung off her hat, and ran into the drawing-room. Her father was pacing up and down at the end of the room near the fireplace. He paused for a moment in his monotonous walk, when he saw Catty standing near the door; then he once again began to walk up and down. Suddenly he threw out his right arm, and began to gesticulate with much force and unction.

‘Yes, gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I think I have now made my meaning thoroughly plain to you; I hope you have taken in my words, and that, that—the grand course of literature which we have had the privilege of going through together will—gentlemen, I trust it will remain in your memories and influence your actions all, all your days. We cannot study the heroic without . . .

I think you understand me; I am now bringing this brilliant course to a close; we have come to the beginning of the fifth century, that time of struggle and of —

‘Father,’ said Catalina, rushing up to him.

‘Don’t interrupt me, my child,’ said the Professor. He pushed her aside, and paced up and down faster and faster. ‘That time of struggle’ . . . he began again. ‘Gentlemen, it has been my privilege to carry you through this wonderful history; it has also been my delight’ — He stared vacantly in front of him, looked again at Catalina, and suddenly flung himself on the sofa where Mrs Gifford had sat the night before. He covered his face with one of his long thin hands, and sat quite silent.

‘In the name of heaven, where am I, Catty?’ he said at last, in a bewildered way.

‘At home, dear father, at home with me, your little Catty,’ she said.

She was terribly frightened, but the emergency of the moment gave her strength.

‘I’ll be back with you in one moment,’ she whispered; ‘just sit where you are till I come back.’ She rushed out of the drawing-room.

Matilda was waiting on the landing.

‘Please, Matilda,’ said Catty, ‘go at once to No. 35; it is at the left-hand corner of the Square. Ask Dr Watson to have the goodness to come here immediately.’

‘Yes, miss,’ said the girl. ‘I had best leave the hall door ajar, so that Alice can let herself in. Oh, there is Alice coming up the steps.’

‘Go at once for Dr Watson,’ repeated Catalina. She rushed back to her father. He was still seated where she had left him; he was gazing with a queer, puzzled expression across the room. When Catty softly laid her little hand on his arm, he started; she nestled up close to him, and drew one of his hands into hers.

‘The lectures are all finished, Catty,’ he said, in a voice of indescribable melancholy. ‘You came in just at the close; you were with me, my child, at the finish. The last word of the last lecture has been delivered, and the Professor—the Professor can—go home.’

He trembled violently as he spoke; his eyes looked queerer than ever—his face whiter; then a purple rush of blood came up, tinging his ears, dyeing his forehead. He tumbled in an unconscious heap on the floor.

When, a moment later, Dr Watson came into the room, he said that Professor Gifford was suffering from an attack of apoplexy.

‘Are you the only one in the house?’ he said, glancing round at Catalina.

‘Yes,’ she replied; then she added, ‘I understand father very well.’

‘There is no question of any one understanding him now,’ said the doctor. ‘He is unconscious, and would not recognise anybody; he is very ill. Your mother ought to be summoned; where is she?’

‘She has gone on the Thames with some friends to spend the day.’

‘Are your sisters with her?’

‘Yes; they will all come back some time to-night.’

‘Well, you and I must manage now as best we can. I daresay, with the aid of the two servants, we may be able to get your father into his room. By the way, before we move him, did he complain of anything last night or this morning?’

‘No, but he kept forgetting things. His Hebrew lectures were all delivered, but he thought he had to do another. I did not think him quite well.’

The doctor nodded.

‘This attack has doubtless been coming on for some time,’ he said; ‘it is a pity I was not sent for before.’

‘Please, Dr Watson?’ asked Catalina, ‘will you tell me the truth?’

‘Certainly, my dear.’

‘Is my father very ill?’

‘I am sorry to say that he is.’

‘Is there?’—Catalina’s lips trembled—‘is there danger?’

‘I cannot deny it,’ said the doctor in a kind voice; ‘but at the same time, people have got over attacks of this sort; apoplexy is always a dangerous complaint, and of course there is also the paralysis which accompanies it. Your father must be properly looked after; I shall send in a nurse.’

'No ; please, let me nurse him ; I would much rather.'

'Impossible, my dear child. You can, of course, stay in the room until your mother returns ; but there must be a trained nurse to take charge of a case like this. Now if the servants will come in, we will get the Professor into his room.'

The two servants entered the room, and the sick man, with some difficulty, was carried into a bedroom on the same landing. The doctor saw him laid on the bed, and then hurried off to fetch a nurse. Catalina found herself for a moment alone with the stricken man. The blow which had so suddenly fallen was sharp, and had completely stunned her. She did not feel at that moment any sense of acute misery ; there was a heavy weight at her heart, a weight which almost amounted to physical pain, but otherwise she was calm, and could think with clearness.

'He will require the best nursing, the greatest love, the uttermost care ; all the strength that I can give him ; all, surely all must save him,' she murmured fiercely to herself.

Then she changed her outdoor boots for some soft slippers, and went quietly, more like some little old woman than a child, about the sick-room. A sort of instinct seemed to tell her exactly what to do ; she opened the windows slightly, and drew down the blinds ; she began to put away the useless and unnecessary things. Before the nurse, whom the doctor had sent in, arrived, the room began to

assume that indescribable look which a sick-room always wears.

The Professor lay stretched out flat in the middle of the bed. How thin and worn and old he appeared ! His breathing was a little stertorous ; there was a faint flush on one cheek ; the rest of his face was deadly pale. He looked like one dead ; only that stertorous breathing gave any token of life.

Alice and Matilda came popping in and out of the room. Alice presently approached the bed and looked down at the sick man.

‘Merciful heaven ! how bad he do look !’ she cried. ‘Oh, Miss Catty, don’t tell me that the Professor is took for death.’

‘He is in danger,’ replied Catty, in her grave voice ; ‘but don’t ask me many questions now, Alice ; what we have got to do is to nurse him, to prevent his dying. Oh Alice, I am sure you will do all you can to help me.’

‘That I will, my dear ; oh how brave and quiet you are, miss, and you so wropped up in the Professor. Why, any one can see with half an eye that you are the darling of his heart, and he the idol o’ yourn. I’m sure, Miss Catty, ef you keep up so splendid, I’m not the one to break down ; oh dear, dear ! I do wish the poor gentleman could be undressed.’

‘I think we won’t do anything till the nurse comes,’ said Catalina. ‘Oh, there’s a ring at the front door.’

‘I’ll fly and open it, miss.’

A moment afterwards, Catalina heard a light, quick step running up the stairs, and a girl's bright face peeped into the sick-room.

'I am the nurse,' said the girl, speaking to Catalina in a cheerful voice. 'Are you Miss Gifford? Are you the only one at home? The doctor has told me something. Oh you poor little dear, I am so glad I am able to come. Now, please, don't be frightened; I'll arrange everything beautifully. Will you ask your maid just to show me to a room where I can take off my bonnet and cloak, and put on my cap?'

Catalina motioned to Alice to take the nurse to her sister's room. She was absent for two or three minutes, and then came down in her nurse's cap and apron, looking as if she had lived in the house for days.

'Now,' she said cheerfully, 'I am ready for anything. And this is the patient.'

'What is your name?' asked Catalina, who came up and stood in stony silence at the head of her father's bed.

'Virginia—Sister Virginia; you had better call me Sister. Now the very first thing is to get the poor gentleman's clothes off; perhaps, Miss Gifford, you will help me?'

'Yes.'

'Will you go and fetch some hot water?'

Catalina went; the nurse bustling actively about. Catalina came back with the hot water, and then stood by, feeling her heart sinking heavier and heavier

within her each moment; the Sister, however, kept the little girl actively employed; she had to fetch many things, to take away others, to help with the sheets on the bed, to remove the Professor's clothes. Soon the sick man was lying comfortably in bed, and the nurse herself sat down by his side.

'Now, Miss Gifford,' she said, 'you have behaved very well; you'll be a capital nurse yourself some day. But you are looking white and tired: that will never do. Go downstairs, please, and take a good meal.'

'I cannot eat,' replied Catalina. 'Is it not bad for him,' she said suddenly, with passion, 'to hear us talking; will it not injure him?'

'No, dear, it cannot do him the least harm; he cannot hear us. Go down, please, Miss Gifford, and have a good meal.'

'I cannot eat.'

Sister Virginia looked very hard at Catty; she then suddenly rose from her post by the bedside, and went out on the landing.

'Follow me, please.'

Catalina did so in some astonishment.

'If you don't wish to be very troublesome, to give a great deal of unnecessary worry, you will go downstairs and take a right, good, nourishing meal. I shall want something to eat myself within an hour or so. Your father may be ill a long time, and if you wish really to help him, you must keep up your strength.'

'Do you mean that?' said Catalina, opening her

eyes ; 'do you think it possible that I can really help to nurse him ?'

'Of course you can, if you keep well and strong.'

'But my throat feels closed ; how is it possible for any one to eat in trouble ?'

'If the people who are in trouble have got common-sense, they will eat,' said Sister Virginia ; 'Now I must go back to my patient. It is the most cruel and selfish thing in the world,' she added, 'to do anything to make yourself ill at a time like the present ; you want extra food in a time of strain like this. If you will go now and have tea, or whatever you like, I will afterwards have something myself ; then you will be composed, and strong enough to sit by the Professor while I am out of the room.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Catty. 'If you 'll only let me help you to nurse him, I 'll eat all the long day if it is necessary.'

'Ah, my dear, that 's right ; I guessed when I saw you that you were a brave child.'

CHAPTER VIII.

A FORLORN HOPE.

HE days that immediately followed lived ever afterwards in Catty Gifford's mind like a long and dreadful dream. She forgot all about that crown of bay which she hoped some day might encircle her brow ; she forgot the Randall School of Art, the importance of the monthly composition, the great scholarship which was to be competed for in the next session ; all that hitherto made up the sum of her earthly existence was now of no moment whatever to her. Every thought, every scrap of strength she possessed was centred upon one object—to snatch from the brink of the grave the best loved of all, to keep the one whom she most cherished still by her side.

‘Please, kind Father in heaven, if father dies, let me die too,’ prayed Catalina once or twice in a great agony ; she had run upstairs to the attic at the top of the house when she raised her frantic supplication to heaven. Here she had flung herself on her knees, and cried out of the very depths of her breaking heart.

But just then, the heavens seemed brass, and, as far as she could tell, there was no answer, no notice taken of her childish and longing prayer. A great gloom settled down over the house, hope seemed quite to have stood aside, and the majestic figure of Death seemed to be for ever casting its shadow upon the threshold. Day after day the Professor lay looking exactly like one dead; neither by word nor look was there the faintest sign of consciousness. The hand of Death itself was heavy upon him, and whether he would ever return from the Valley of the Shadow grew more and more doubtful as the weary hours went by.

Sister Virginia was a capital nurse, and was at that time the only person who quite kept her senses. She could not only be a nurse, but also a valuable friend and adviser. She encouraged the unhappy children, and the still more bewildered and unhappy wife, to show plenty of self-control; she also insisted on their attending to the rules of common-sense; they must eat plenty, sleep plenty, take a sufficient amount of exercise, and, in short, attend to the rules of health for themselves, otherwise they would also be ill, and the trouble and expense materially increased.

‘You must all help me,’ said Sister Virginia. ‘For the sake of the sick man, you must all be calm, you must eat plenty of good nourishing food, you must go out at stated times; as far as possible you must all live your usual lives.’

So the household managed somehow or other to keep on its way ; and by degrees, as little change took place in the sick-room, the family went on outwardly as if there was no tragedy hanging over them. Meals went on at the stated hours ; people went to bed and slept and rose again in the morning, wondering why they had been able to pass such long quiet hours while death was hovering over the house. And the man who was lying like one dead knew nothing of all this ; he was never conscious of the hushed and anxious steps which so constantly crept up to the bedside, and then went out of the silent room.

On the 27th of June, the Randall School broke up. There was now no chance of Catalina sending in her composition. She must give up the thought of the scholarship which she had intended to try for at the next session. Teddy reminded her of it one day ; he had met one of her fellow-students, who had stopped to ask him how the Professor was, and to speak of Catalina.

‘Did I really mean to try for the scholarship ?’ she said ; she put her hand to her forehead as she spoke. ‘Yes, of course, I remember,’ she continued. ‘But it does not matter, Teddy ; nothing really matters now.’

At last there came a day when Dr Watson came into the sick-room and stood for some time looking anxiously down at his patient’s face. He felt the pulse in the Professor’s limp wrist, and taking out his stethoscope applied it to the heart. He was under

the impression that there was no one in the room but Sister Virginia; he did not see Catty, who was partly hidden by one of the curtains.

‘The change I have been so long anticipating will in all probability come to-night, nurse,’ he said.

‘I thought so,’ she answered. Neither did Sister Virginia know that Catty was in the room.

‘There has been a faint movement once or twice this morning,’ she continued, ‘and the twitching of the lips has been rather more marked.’

‘There will be a change to-night,’ continued the doctor, ‘either for life or for death; I shall come in about nine o’clock to see the patient again.’

‘Is your opinion favourable, Dr Watson?’ asked the Sister, going with the doctor as far as the door.

He shook his head and lowered his voice.

‘I would not tell the poor things downstairs,’ he said, speaking in a semi-whisper, ‘but I apprehend the worst; the weakness is very much marked, and the heart’s action sadly intermittent.’

There was a faint moaning sound heard at that moment, which seemed to proceed from the bed. The doctor and the nurse both started and looked round; the motionless figure lay, however, as still as before, rigidity in every line, the face deadly pale.

‘I fancied I heard something,’ said the doctor; ‘I must have been mistaken. Expect me at nine o’clock to-night, nurse. If anything occurs between now and then, send for me immediately.’

The nurse promised, and then accompanied the doctor out of the room.

The moment she did so, Catty stole softly from behind the curtain; she knelt down now by her father's side, and pressed her dark curly head against his pillow.

'Dear father,' she said, in a clear voice, but full of great agony, 'if you are really going away, won't you take me with you? I can't live in this world without you. Oh father, take me with you if you go.'

Had her words really pierced through the mask which seemed to enshroud all that was left of her beloved father? She fancied for a moment that she saw a real movement of the lips; but no: she must have been mistaken. When Sister Virginia entered the room, Catty went softly and silently out.

'Catalina,' said the nurse, catching sight of her face, 'the day is a fine one; you ought to go out.'

Catalina sadly shook her head.

'Poor little girl,' said the nurse to herself, 'I do wish I could spare her this terrible blow. How much she loves her father; she is completely wrapped up in him.' The nurse went and sat down by the patient's bedside.

Sister Virginia, like a clever general, had marked out a plan of action for the entire house long before now. She was the one who was heading this forlorn hope against the awful intrusion of Death; she was the one who knew most of the many vagaries, the many cruel tricks of man's greatest foe. All the

others were willing to follow where Sister Virginia led; she had drawn up a chart, not only for the sick-room, but for the actions of every one else in the house; so much time for sleep, so much time for food, so much time for rest and recreation.

It was Mrs Gifford's turn to sit up during the early hours of the night which was immediately to follow. She was to go into her husband's room about eight, and keep watch until one in the morning. While she sat there, Sister Virginia herself would lie down on a sofa in the adjoining dressing-room.

Now Catalina, knowing what she knew, was determined in her own little mind that she would take her mother's place to-night. In order to do this, she must be careful to keep her terrible knowledge to herself. The nurse had evidently said nothing about it; the doctor also meant to keep his own council. Catalina had overheard; she alone of the whole family knew. To-night, the anxiously-looked-for crisis would take place. For life or for death, and to-night! Whatever happened, at whatever risk, she would be present when her father—when—her pale lips could not form the voiceless word. At least the privilege would be accorded to her, who knew him best of all, who loved him as none of the others loved him, to be with him in the moment of his departure; or she would be the first, the very first to welcome him back from the shadowy shores of Death.

Her strong determination helped to keep her quite cool and calm; she was watchful over her own self; even her grief and terrible anxiety were kept in abeyance. At dinner-time she was helped twice to meat, and even asked for a second supply of pudding.

‘You seem much better to-day, Catty, although you are so pale,’ exclaimed Rose in a kind voice. Both the older girls were very kind to Catty now—so also was her mother. The blow which had fallen on the family seemed to knit them all more closely together. Rose drew Catty’s chair close to her own.

‘You must go for a walk as soon as dinner is over,’ she said.

‘Catty can’t do that,’ exclaimed Mrs Gifford; ‘it is her turn to watch in the Professor’s room this afternoon. I am going out; it is true I did have an hour in the open air this morning, but it is a beautiful day.’

‘It is just a perfect day,’ said Agnes; ‘there is a gentle breeze and’—

‘Mother,’ said Catalina suddenly—her face went paler than ever, her lips trembled—‘mother, if you would sit with father for a couple of hours now, I could be with him to-night; I really want the air very badly,’ she added, ‘my head aches so.’

Mrs Gifford looked her little girl up and down.

‘I don’t mind if I do,’ she said. ‘It was my turn to go into the sick-room at eight o’clock to-night, to stay

there until one. Catty, you ought to be asleep at that hour.'

'Mother, I cannot sleep well lately. I would much rather go out now, and take a walk, and then this evening I could watch by father.'

'But the night is much the most anxious time, and you are so young.'

'Young as she is, she is a very nice little nurse, mother,' said Rose; 'I wish you could hear Sister Virginia talking about her. There is no doubt whatever that Catty carries an old head on young shoulders, and you know'—

'Yes, mother,' interrupted Catty, 'you know that I am not really by myself; Sister Virginia will be in the dressing-room, and I can call her if anything goes wrong.'

'Very well,' said Mrs Gifford, 'I agree; the fact is, I am nearly dead with sleep now, and should be right glad to go early to bed this evening. I'll look after your father then, Catty, from three to five, and you may have your walk. Now, put on your hat at once, and go into Regent's Park.'

Catalina fled from the room; she rushed upstairs, pinned on her hat, caught up her gloves, and ran down again. She paused for just a moment on the landing outside her father's room; the door of the sick-room was a little ajar. There was a screen which hid the bed and the patient; but from where Catalina stood, she could just see the hem of Sister Virginia's white dress.

She stepped softly now inside the screen, and called the nurse, in a voice which was little more than a whisper. The Sister rose at once and approached the door.

‘It is all arranged,’ said Catty.

‘What, my dear?’

‘Mother is going to take care of father while you are at dinner, and are having your rest, and I am going out.’

‘But your mother is to sit up this evening?’

‘No, Sister Virginia, I’ll sit up then; I am quite determined. I have arranged everything with mother, and she agrees. I came to you now, Sister, to beg of you not to interfere.’

‘Not to interfere?’ said the Sister in some astonishment.

‘Please don’t. It is life or death to me; you won’t put any obstacle in the way, will you, please, please?’

Sister Virginia was well accustomed to scenes of tragedy; she read something of the truth in Catty’s eyes.

‘I won’t say a word if you really wish it, Catalina,’ she answered gravely.

The little girl caught her hand, and kissed it.

‘Thank you,’ she said; ‘I’ll be here to-night. Thank God, whatever happens, I’ll be here to-night.’

The next moment she found herself in the open air. It was a lovely summer’s afternoon; the softest breeze was blowing. London as it was, there was a scent of flowers somewhere in the air. Catalina looked round; she saw a girl with a great basket of roses on her arm.



'No, I want this bunch ; I have only got one shilling.'

A sudden and passionate desire to take a bunch of roses into her father's room seized her. She felt in her purse; the purse contained a solitary shilling, only one. Catalina called the flower-girl to her side.

‘How are you selling your roses?’ she asked.

‘Two a penny, miss; they are wonderful cheap to-day, these wired ones. You'll buy a pen'orth, won't you, miss?’

‘I don't want those wired ones; I want these, here. Will you give me this big bunch for a shilling?’

‘One-and-sixpence, miss.’

‘I have only got a shilling. It is a beautiful bunch; I wish you would let me have it.’

‘I really can't, miss. You can have some o' these roses, two a penny; that will be twenty-four for your shillin'. I 'll give you twenty-six if you 'll take a whole shillin's worth. Shall I count 'em out to you, miss?’

‘No, I want this bunch; I have only got one shilling. I do wish you would let me have it.’

The girl looked at her.

‘Why should I make you a present of sixpence, miss?’ she asked suddenly.

Catalina returned her gaze with eyes full of passion.

‘Only because it would be kind—it would be a charity,’ she said; ‘I have got this shilling, and no more. Did you never do a charity in your life? You would feel very nice if you would do it to-day for me.’

‘Well, I never!’ exclaimed the girl. ‘I am too poor

to do deeds o' charity, miss,' she said, speaking with a slow sort of reluctance.

'It would make you happy,' said Catalina. 'I want the roses for a very sick person.' The little girl's eyes filled with tears, although none fell.

'I never!' repeated the flower-girl again.

Catalina held out her hand for the bunch of roses.

'There, take it,' said the other girl suddenly; 'you are a queer sort, you are. It were never put to me that I were to do a charity; take it.'

'God bless you,' answered Catalina. She seized the roses, put the shilling into the girl's hand, and then looked her full in the face.

'May I kiss you instead of the sixpence?' she said suddenly.

'Lor'! miss, you do make me feel queer,' said the girl.

Catalina bent forward, and kissed her on her forehead; she then hurried up Gabriel Street.

The flower-girl looked after her, rubbing her forehead softly, and then went off, smiling to herself.

'I never did a charity afore; it's a wonderful happy sort o' feel,' she said softly, under her breath. She sat down on the nearest curb stone and began to sing; some passers-by drew near and asked her the price of her roses. She sold more during the next hour than she had done yet that day; she began to consider that Catalina had brought her luck.

Meanwhile Catalina, hurrying up Gabriel Street,

buried her nose many times in the delicious fragrance of the roses ; they seemed to intoxicate her, to comfort her.

‘ When he gets better to-night, when he first opens his eyes, I hope he will look at these,’ she said to herself ; she felt strengthened and much more hopeful with regard to the issue so close at hand.

She was just passing the Randall School, and had turned down a street to her left, which would take her in the direction of Regent’s Park, when she heard a girl suddenly call her name. She stopped in some astonishment ; the girl was Rhoda Stanford.

‘ I am really pleased to see you,’ called out Rhoda ; ‘ how do you do ?’

‘ I cannot stay with you now,’ answered Catalina ; ‘ how do you do ?’ She held out her hand with some reluctance. ‘ I am in a great hurry,’ she added.

‘ Where are you going ?’

‘ I am going to Regent’s Park.’

‘ Why should you be in such a hurry to get there ?’

‘ I want to get there, Rhoda ; I really cannot stay with you now.’

Rhoda looked Catalina up and down, from her pretty face to the toes of her shoes.

‘ You know, of course,’ she said, ‘ that the school has broken up and the long vacation has begun. I am leaving town on Monday ; I just came round now to fetch away some of my things. By the by, you didn’t return to school during the last week or ten days ; I

have wondered why.' She gave Catalina a glance full of meaning, which the little girl was far too preoccupied to notice.

'I didn't go back to school because my father has been very ill,' she replied.

'Your father—the great Professor?'

'Yes.'

Rhoda now turned and began to walk up the street by Catalina's side.

'If you are going to Regent's Park, I may as well do the same,' she said; 'I have nothing special to do. I am really glad I met you. I don't believe you know anything at all of what has happened.'

Catalina looked at her companion in a vague way. There was a great gulf between her present life and her last day at school; her head ached even to think of those matters which had once interested her so intensely.

'I know you don't particularly want my company,' continued Rhoda. 'Of course I am sorry your father is ill; he must be very ill, or you surely would not have missed the end of the term, the most important time of all.'

'He is very ill, very ill,' answered Catalina. 'I am sorry,' she added, 'but I can't talk about it.'

'I don't want to force your confidence; you certainly look dreadfully worried, and not at all well. I repeat once more that I am really sorry about your father. I was out dining with some people the other night, and I

heard them talking about him; they said he was one of the cleverest lecturers in London.'

Catalina did not reply.

'I suppose you are very proud of him?'

'That is not the word,' answered Catty, below her breath.

'I see what you mean. Not that I at all understand your sort: you belong to those people who go in for affection and family ties, and all that sort of thing; now it so happens that I am not at all proud of my parents, nor of any of my belongings for that matter. We are a give-and-take family: we don't pretend to have any special sort of love for one another; in fact, my brother and I seldom spend a day without having a good, jolly quarrel; and as to father and mother—well, mother is somewhat old-fashioned, and has not at all my ideas with regard to society, and father is only useful because he keeps me in plenty of cash. No, I don't understand your sort; but then I have money at my command, and money is a very good thing. See this beautiful new bangle. Father gave it to me yesterday because it was my birthday; is not the diamond in the clasp magnificent?'

'I don't know anything about jewellery,' replied Catalina.

'Don't you? Jewellery interests me very much. I suppose you didn't send in the composition, with all this illness in your home?'

'No,'

‘Then you won’t be able to try for the scholarship next session?’

‘No.’

‘How queerly you speak; I must say you are not at all communicative. Perhaps you don’t intend to return to the Randall School; if that is so—if that is so,’ continued Rhoda, speaking with slow emphasis, ‘we shall understand.’

But here Catalina had opened her eyes wide; she started as if some one had awakened her out of a sort of trance.

‘Of course I shall go back to the Randall School some day,’ she said, ‘but I have no time to think of it now.’

‘You evidently are quite in the dark with regard to all that has happened since you left. It is my duty to retail something to your memory. Don’t you remember the fuss there was the last day you were at school, about the caricatures which were scribbled on the masters’ easels?’

‘Yes, I remember now,’ said Catalina; ‘I had forgotten all about it until you mentioned it.’

‘So you say; it is often easy to forget unpleasant things.’

‘I don’t understand you.’

‘Well, I need not waste your time trying to explain to you now; I’ll just tell you what happened. You know there was to be a thorough search into the entire matter on the following Monday; well, there was. You cannot imagine what a commotion was kicked up.

The three principal professors came into the girls' studio, and Professor Forde gave us all a most solemn lecture. He was the spokesman for the others, and he accused us in round terms of being unladylike, vulgar, and sly ; he said the guilty person must be discovered, and that not a stone would be left unturned to get her to confess her guilt. He spoke in the names of the other professors in this matter, and prohibited any one of the girls in our studio to compete for the scholarship until the matter was thoroughly cleared up. You can imagine the excitement. Finally, he asked each and all of us in turn if we had anything whatever to do with the matter ; if we could throw any light on it ; and a lot of other straight questions. Of course we each and all of us answered "No," being each and all of us absolutely innocent.'

'But some one must have been guilty,' interrupted Catalina.

'Well, of course, some one *is* guilty, and the thing is to discover whom. You were the only pupil absent from the school on Monday morning. Your absence was noticed ; Professor Forde asked about you, and said that he must put the same questions to you he had put to the rest of us, whenever you returned to the school. Think of that, Catalina. How will you like it when you find yourself had up before the entire school ? Think of the sensation.'

'I shan't mind,' said Catalina ; 'I shall simply tell the truth.'

‘Oh, will you? Well, we are all waiting for you. If you deny all knowledge of the act, then fresh steps are to be taken; but nothing more can be done until you return to your place in the school. I did think that perhaps you would smuggle out of it: it occurred to me that it might be the best plan; but I see you are going to brave the ordeal which is before you. The matter rests now, until you either deny having had anything to do with the caricatures, or until you confess your guilt.’

‘I confess my guilt!’ said Catalina, her eyes flashing angrily.

She was fully awake at last.

‘What next are you going to say to me, Rhoda?’ she exclaimed.

‘You need not get so red, nor look so angry; you either did it, or did not do it, surely.’

‘Of course I did not do it.’

‘So you say; but you’ll have to say the same before the professors in school the first day next term. Fond as Professor Forde is of you, he is not going to let you off; it is well known that you are the only one of us who can caricature. If I were you’—

‘Do not say any more,’ said Catalina. ‘I cannot imagine why you should suspect me, but you evidently do.’

‘I never said I suspected you: *qui s’excuse, s’accuse.* Now I’ll say nothing more on that subject, for you have got so red and look so put out; I never knew

you could have so much colour. By the way, do you know you have left your string-bag hanging up in the dressing-room; don't you want it? I can fetch it for you, for I am going back to the school now. I can leave it at your house, if you like.'

'No, let it be,' said Catalina; 'it can stay where it is until next term. I really cannot stay another moment, Rhoda.'

'Good-bye,' said Rhoda; she gave Catty a keen glance. The little girl held out her hand mechanically; she had been angry for a moment, but already she had forgotten all about Rhoda, and the caricatures on the professors' easels. Her sorrow was too heavy, too near, too dreadful. Minor matters could not affect her for any length of time on that dreadful day.

As Catalina hurried out of sight, Rhoda stood and watched her retreating footsteps.

'What hot water she will find herself in presently,' murmured the cruel girl. 'I could almost be sorry that I have done what I did, but it is quite too late now; the crime must be traced home to her in order to save myself. Surely I would do more than that for my own precious self. I was never one of those goody-goody folks who stick up for being unselfish, and all that sort of thing. I believe it is one's bounden duty to look after number one. Well, I got into a mess without meaning it, and Catalina must get me out; that is easy enough, and I think I can manage it. Poor child, though, she must be suffering

a good deal just now ; and I suppose, wonderful to relate, she is fond of that queer, frowsy old Professor. That sort of affection is quite beyond my comprehension. Well, she will have other troubles by-and-by. After all, though, she deserves them. Was not she the one to tell me that she saw nothing, no spirit, no power, no point in my art ? She dared to tell me what she really thought, and she gets on so well herself ; but she shall eat humble-pie, and screen me at the same time. I am glad, I am very glad.'

Rhoda hurried back to the Randall School to fetch her forgotten property. Catty's little bag was now the solitary article left in the dressing-room. The man who had charge of the different properties came up to Rhoda, and spoke about it.

'The things ought to be fetched away,' he said ; 'we are going to whitewash and repaper during the holidays. You don't happen to know Miss Gifford, do you, miss ?'

'Yes, I met her just now.'

'Did you tell her, miss, that she left a bag here ?'

'I did ; but she said it didn't matter. Her father, Professor Gifford, is very ill, Jackson. I don't think she has time to think of anything of this sort just now.'

'Well, she is a very nice little lady,' muttered Jackson. 'I'd be the last to worry her, if she is in trouble of any sort. I suppose I had best keep the

bag, then, miss ; I don't suppose there's anything of consequence in it.'

'It is impossible for me to tell you that,' said Rhoda. 'I would not throw anything away that is in it, if I were you, Jackson.' Rhoda looked eagerly as she spoke at the piece of folded paper which showed plainly through the meshes of the string. 'Put the bag away just as it is, in some drawer, until Miss Gifford comes back,' she added, and then she hurried out of the school.

Meanwhile Catty, having reached Regent's Park, sat down near one of the ponds, and watched the children as they sailed little boats on the water, and threw in morsels of paper, and laughed and made themselves happy after the manner of healthy children. Catty was fond of children, and at another time would have been tempted to join their play ; now she watched them with lack-lustre eyes. She had forgotten all about Rhoda and the Art school ; the tiresome subject of the caricatures on the professors' easels never once returned to her memory after she had parted with Miss Stanford. One thought alone filled all her horizon—the word 'father' seemed written straight across her sky. How much she had loved her father, how dear he had been to her, how completely the love he had given her and the love she had given him satisfied her heart ! Now he was lying between life and death. At this hour to-morrow she would know the best or the worst ; either she would be the happiest,

the bravest, the most joyful little girl in all the world, or something would have struck so heavily at her young life, that she could never, never, happen what might, be the same Catalina again.

A stray dog came up, and thrust its nose into her hand ; she had a great love for animals, and patted the creature now, and seemed to feel a little comfort from its mute caress.

Suddenly glancing at the sun, she guessed that the time of her enforced absence from home must be nearly over, and turned, with a quickening of her heart-beats, in the direction of Mervyn Square.

Just as she reached the hall door, Rose, neatly dressed, and looking bright and almost cheerful, came out.

‘Ah, Catty,’ she exclaimed, ‘here you are. I hope you enjoyed your walk. Oh, what lovely roses !’

‘They are for father,’ said Catalina. ‘How is he ?’

‘Just the same ; he never seems to change from day to day. I could not have imagined an illness like his. Catty, those roses are exquisite, *La France* roses always are, and then the perfume ! Do let me take a sniff.’

Catalina gave up the roses somewhat unwillingly.

‘Don’t smell them too much,’ she said ; ‘I want father to get all the perfume.’

Rose laughed, and pushed the bunch back into Catty’s hands.

‘They must have cost a lot, you extravagant child !’ she cried.

‘Only my last shilling,’ replied Catalina briefly ; she did not add any more, but passed by Rose into the house.

‘Tell mother,’ called her sister after her, ‘that I am going to the fishmonger’s to get some ice, and Sister Virginia wants a little more fruit.’

‘Yes,’ answered Catty. She ran upstairs, met her mother on the way, delivered Rose’s message, and then went on to her own room. Here she put the roses in water, and then sitting down near the table on which she had placed them, began once more in her thoughts to go round and round that ceaseless dread which would always creep up and stare her in the face. To-night her father would pass through the gates either of life or of death ; by this time to-morrow she would either be the happiest girl in all the world, or she would be fatherless. Her lips moved in a sort of monotonous refrain : she had ceased to pray ; she had also ceased to struggle. If the blow was to fall, she felt that nothing in all the world could avert it. If, on the other hand ! She raised her eyes to the blue sky overhead ; a feeling of ecstasy shot for a brief moment through her numbed little heart, but then it passed. She had really little or no hope ; all was agony, a kind of dull despair.

Presently Agnes ran upstairs, burst open the door of the room, and seeing Catty, called out to her that tea was ready.

‘You don’t look a bit better for your walk,’ she said. ‘I really wish you would not fret so dreadfully. Suppose’——

‘Oh, please, Agnes, don’t let us begin to suppose anything to-night,’ said Catalina; ‘I just can’t listen. Please, Aggie, don’t talk about it.’

‘Very well, I won’t,’ said Agnes. ‘I really never saw anybody like you, Catty. How are you to live through life if you take things so hard? You are as white as a sheet, and you are getting as thin as a skeleton. Now come downstairs with me. Oh, by the way, I have some news for you. Whom do you think I met this morning?’

Catalina felt too tired and hopeless even to reply.

‘Well, you’ll never guess, so I’ll tell you. No less a person than the great Professor Forde. He stopped me at once to inquire about father. Well, do you know what he said?’

‘What?’ asked Catalina in a lifeless whisper.

‘Now I wonder if this will wake you up. These were his exact words, “How is my friend, the little professor?” I stared, as well I might; I had not the least idea whom he meant. Then he explained. It seems that “the little professor” is your nickname in the school. He spoke very kindly about you, Catty, and said that you showed much promise. Now surely that ought to cheer you up, ought it not?’

Catalina smiled; her smile was very wan and sorrowful.

‘I don’t believe that—that I really care,’ she said.

‘Oh you are past everything if that doesn’t rouse you,’ said Agnes; ‘well, at any rate, eat you must, or mother won’t let you sit up to-night.’

Without knowing it, Agnes had at last struck the chord which was quite to awaken Catalina. Her eyes opened wide, and became full of alarm.

‘Of course I am going to eat plenty,’ she said; ‘I am perfectly well. It will be most unfair if, if I am not allowed—oh Aggie, you’ll see; oh, dear Aggie, you’ll see that I am allowed—I mean that nothing is to prevent my sitting up to-night. You won’t let mother come in the way of that.’

‘Dear me, child, you really are excited now with a vengeance. Why should you think so very much of staying up on this special night?’

‘I can’t tell you; don’t ask me. It is all arranged, is it not?’

‘Well, of course it is arranged—that is, if you are well enough; I certainly think you very queer, and by no means yourself.’

‘I am sad, but I am quite well; I am going to have such a splendid tea. Yes, of course, it was very kind of Professor Forde to say that about me. Do tell me again what he said.’

‘Only that you are the little professor, and that you show promise.’

‘Well, of course I am glad, I am delighted. It is a great thing to get his good opinion; he praises

one so little. Where did you say you met him, Aggie ?'

' Just at the corner of this Square. He was hurrying by when he caught sight of me ; then he stopped and came up to ask about father. I am pleased that something has roused you ; you look quite bright and much better now.'

The two girls entered the dining-room. Tea was laid on the table, but they were the first to appear. Agnes seated herself in front of the tea-tray and poured out cups of tea ; she gave one to Catty, who drank it off, and then drawing a plate of bread and butter close to her, began to eat slice after slice with rapidity. The bread was as sawdust in her mouth, and the hot tea seemed only to choke and scald her, but she ate and drank valiantly, and even attempted to laugh. She told Agnes the story of the La France roses, and the means by which she had got the flower-girl to do a deed of charity.

' You don't mean to say you kissed her ?' said Agnes.

' Yes, I did ; the roses were worth a kiss.'

' It was very queer and uncommon of you, Catty ; just like you, I may say. Well, of course, they are splendid roses.'

Mrs Gifford entered the room, and Agnes resigned her place at the tea-tray.

' I don't like your father's state at all, girls,' said the mother, as she poured herself out a cup of tea ; ' sometimes he seems scarcely to breathe. I can see too,

although she says nothing, that Sister Virginia is very anxious about him. I shall certainly stay up to-night.'

'But oh, mother,' said Catty, uttering a cry, 'you remember you promised.'

'I promised!—what, my dear?—I really wish you would not worry me, Catty.'

'But I must, for you promised. You know I went out to-day on purpose that you should go to bed to-night; it is my turn; it is all arranged that I am to sit up.'

'My dear child, you are talking in a very strange way; surely this is not the moment to think about yourself. Your turn indeed! Oh, my poor children, what do promises or anything else matter at an awful moment like this! My dear, dear girls, I am terribly anxious about your father.' Mrs Gifford burst into tears.

Catty felt nearly driven to despair. Had she denied herself all day, had she left her father during the precious two hours when she might have sat alone by his side, for this; just to be ignominiously banished from his side at the critical moment? Her heart beat with great throbs, her agony made her almost fierce.

Mrs Gifford's brief shower of tears was quickly over; she dried her eyes, and began to eat bread and butter, and to drink tea.

'I am better now,' she said, smiling at Agnes; 'per-

haps matters are not as bad as I feared when I sat in that room, and saw nothing but that dear, silent face. I was alone with your father for some time, and I really got quite nervous about his breathing, it was so very faint; and then I fancied that Sister Virginia was more anxious than she cared to show. After all, it may have been fancy, and there may be no special change one way or another for some time longer. I am really dead with sleep and with fatigue. I shall just have a sofa wheeled into the room and lie there.'

'Then, mother, if you are as tired as all that'—began Catty.

'Now, what is it, Catty? I do wish you would not jerk out your words in that queer way; you only add to my nervousness.'

'I don't mean to, mother; but may I sit beside father while you lie and rest on the sofa?'

'Yes, do let her,' said Agnes. 'I declare the child is in such a state that I believe she will be ill herself if'—

'Oh, I shall—I shan't be able to—to *bear* it,' said Catty, laying fearful emphasis on the word. 'Oh mother, let me sit in father's room; I shall die if you don't.'

'Dear, dear! well, anything for a quiet time,' said Mrs Gifford. 'Have your own way, Catty, only don't blame me if the doctor is angry. I suppose you can stay perfectly quiet on that little chair at the back of the curtain. But remember now, Catalina,

I shall allow no tears and no nonsense of any sort. If you cannot control yourself, out you go.'

'I will control myself, mother; I'll be better than gold.'

Catalina crept slowly up to her mother, went on her knees, raised Mrs Gifford's plump hand to her lips, and kissed it.

'Thank you, mummy,' she said.

'Well, I am glad I have quieted you, my love. Now, Catty, jump up and cut me some bread and butter; I am really starving. I shall feel much better when I have had a really good tea. You might ring the bell; I should like Alice to poach me a couple of eggs. Of course, my dears, with the strain I am now undergoing it is my duty to take as much nourishment as possible.'

'Of course, mother,' said Agnes, ringing the bell as she spoke.

The eggs were ordered, and Mrs Gifford made a capital tea.

The rest of the long evening passed somehow, and at last the night began. A great and solemn silence settled down over the Professor's home. Teddy had gone to bed early; Rose and Agnes, who had both sat up during the previous night, had also gone to their rooms, worn out with fatigue. Mrs Gifford, no longer at all anxious, was curled up comfortably on a sofa at the foot of the Professor's bed. Sister Virginia and Catty now watched together.

‘ You will lie down, won’t you, Sister?’ said the little girl.

‘ Not to-night, I think, Catalina,’ said the Sister.

A very small fire was burning in the grate in a distant part of the room. The nurse went and stood by it as she spoke; Catty followed and stood near her. Catty seemed to read the thoughts in her eyes. Sister Virginia was a girl of not more than five or six-and-twenty, but she looked old and overworried to-night. She kept going backwards and forwards between the bed and the fire; Catty stood near the fire and watched her with all her heart in her eyes. She dared not speak; the question she longed to ask meant too much; the passion and agony in her heart kept her silent. Presently the Doctor’s step was heard ascending the stairs; he came quickly into the sick-room. Mrs Gifford was so sound asleep, so worn out with fatigue, that she never heard him; he went up and approached the bedside. The sick man was lying very still, strangely quiet and motionless; there seemed to be scarcely any breath coming from the faintly-parted lips: the long, thin face was gray too; under the closed eyes there were dark shadows. The Doctor bent low over his patient; he took the limp hand and felt the pulse which scarcely fluttered at all in the thin wrist.

‘ Bring a candle, nurse,’ he said suddenly.

Before the nurse could obey, Catalina rushed forward, took up a candle which was standing behind

a screen in a distant part of the room, and brought it up to the Doctor.

‘You ought to be in bed,’ said Dr Watson, just glancing at her, and then turning again to his patient. He took the candle from her hand and passed it backwards and forwards before the sick man’s face; he raised one of the closed eyelids and looked into the eye; then he set the candle down.

‘A little brandy, please,’ he said.

The nurse gave it to him; he poured some into a glass, and managed to get a few drops between the sick man’s lips. Having done so, he watched for a full moment with a look of intense anxiety; the faintest possible sound was heard, and the Doctor gave a sigh of satisfaction.

‘He has swallowed it,’ he said; ‘that is well: there will be a change immediately.’

‘For life?’ asked Catalina. ‘A change for life?’

‘You ought to be in bed, Catalina; this is no place for you,’ said the Doctor.

She did not utter a word. She bit her lips convulsively; they almost bled. She clenched her nails into her hands and stood motionless. Her heart was now beating so loudly that she could scarcely hear the Doctor’s next words. He was saying something to the nurse: she gave him a sheet of paper; he hastily scribbled a prescription upon it.

‘Take this yourself to the chemist,’ he said; ‘I will

watch here till you return. Be as quick as you can, nurse ; it is just a chance.'

'A chance,' thought Catalina. 'Then the worst, the very worst has not come ; there is still a chance.'

Mrs Gifford slept on. Her gentle, satisfied, luxurious breathing was heard at monotonous intervals in the silent bedroom. The nurse had flown as if on the wings of the wind to get the medicine. The Doctor, with his watch in his hand, was again feeling the Professor's pulse.

'One, two ; very weak, very intermittent ; one, two,' Catalina heard him murmur.

'Brandy,' he said suddenly to her.

She brought it to him ; he poured a few more drops into a spoon, and parted the sick man's lips ; again, after a pause, there was the faintest gurgling sound in the throat.

'He has swallowed it,' said the Doctor again.

The nurse hurried back. She carried a bottle in her hand ; the Doctor immediately poured some of its contents on a handkerchief ; the room was filled with a strong and pungent smell. The Doctor held the handkerchief to the patient's nose. The moment he did so a faint wave of colour like the slightest touch of rose swept over the death-cold face, the nostrils quivered, then the eyes opened—they opened for half a moment to close again.

The Doctor looked round at this moment at Catalina. Her eager eyes were blazing like stars ; the colour of

damask roses had risen to both her cheeks ; her lips were firmly closed. She looked strong ; the strength of love was stimulating her whole little frame.

‘Here,’ said the Doctor suddenly—he pouled a lot more of the pungent stuff on the handkerchief—‘hold this to his face, not too close ; ah ! that’s right. Stand so that I may watch him. Hold the handkerchief just so ; he will get the whiff without any danger of suffocation. He will probably open his eyes again. Let him see you when he does so.’

‘Yes,’ said Catalina.

She did exactly as the Doctor told her. Again there was that overpowering smell from the powerful stimulant, again the returning colour came into the Professor’s face, his eyes opened wide ; he looked directly into the dark, glowing eyes of his little daughter.

At that moment it seemed to him that he saw right down into Catalina’s heart ; all the love in it shone on her face, and spiritualised it.

‘How beautiful you are, child !’ he whispered.

Catalina fell suddenly forward ; the Doctor took the handkerchief from her hand.

‘You are much better, Professor,’ she heard him say ; then she tumbled on the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IX.

LITTLE KNIGHT-ERRANT.



HE turn for the better had really taken place, and the Professor began to mend. In a few days he was out of danger; the attack of apoplexy was rapidly passing off. He was very weak, more like a shadow than a living man, but Death had withdrawn from his immediate vicinity; it might be and probably was still lurking in the background, but for the present the Professor had turned his face once more towards the shore of Life.

Catalina was now found to be extremely useful; there was no one so anxious, no one so willing as she to give up all her time to her father. The great excitement being over, the rest of the family began to breathe freely once again. Agnes and Rose, kind-hearted and good-natured girls as they were, had never that passionate love for their father which Catalina possessed. They wanted to go out, to see their friends, to put on their smartest dresses, their gayest ribbons, to live life on their own account once again. Catalina was there-

fore allowed to spend most of her time in the sick-room ; nothing in all the wide world could give her greater happiness. During these days she seemed really to live and breathe for her father. The Professor hardly ever spoke, he was yet incapable of many words ; but he used to follow Catty with his languid eyes, and when his eyes met hers, both pair of eyes smiled. Once, as she was passing close to his chair, he held out his feeble hand ; she clasped it in both of hers.

‘ You are exactly like your grandmother, Catty,’ he said ; his voice was so feeble that she had to strain her ears to catch the sound.

The days flew on, passing into weeks, and even into months ; July, with its heat and luxuriance, gave way to August. All the fashionable people had now left town ; the roll of carriage wheels was hardly ever heard going through Mervyn Square.

The Professor had sufficiently recovered to be moved from his bed to a sofa : the sofa was drawn up close to the open window ; still very little air came into the languid room. Mr Gifford’s face was much the same colour as the pillow against which it lay ; his long, thin hands were almost transparent ; his blue-gray eyes seemed to assume, more and more each day, an unearthly, far-away expression. Sometimes to Catalina, as she watched him, he seemed more like a dream-father than a real one. Still she knew that he was really there in the flesh, and during those days she was

perfectly happy. She was too childish and young to know of any cause for alarm in the present state of things; she lived altogether in the present, and would not allow the future to trouble her.

Just at the beginning of the second month of the illness, Dr Watson came upstairs as usual to see his patient. Sister Virginia had long ago resigned her charge, and Catty was sitting by the Professor's side reading aloud to him when the Doctor entered the room.

He came up to the foot of the sofa, and fixed his keen eyes full upon Professor Gifford's languid face.

'You are standing still; this will never do,' he said suddenly.

The Professor smiled.

'I am doing very well,' he answered.

'Not a bit of it. I repeat, you are standing still; you want change, and as soon as possible. There is lovely weather somewhere at this time of year.'

'It is lovely here,' said Catalina suddenly.

'Do you call this air lovely?' answered the doctor; 'this stifling, used-up atmosphere. Look at the trees in the middle of the Square, they are perfectly gray, they are eaten up with London dust, and so, for that matter, are the living inhabitants of this house. What would I not give for a whiff of the real country air. That is what you want, Professor.'

The Doctor again looked keenly at the pale, worn face on the pillow, then he abruptly turned on his heel.

‘Where is your mother?’ he asked of Rose, whom he happened to meet on the stairs.

‘She has just come in, Doctor; do you want her?’

‘Yes, I wish to speak to her. Run and ask her if she can spare me a few moments.’

‘Will you come into the drawing-room while I fetch mother?’

Rose opened the door as she spoke and ushered the Doctor into the ugly and neglected room; it looked even more dreary than the bedroom he had just quitted.

‘Poor people, what will become of them?’ he reflected.

The next moment, Mrs Gifford, flushed about the face, panting slightly as regards breath, but good-humoured and jovial, entered.

‘Well, Doctor,’ she said, ‘and how is your patient? I think he slept remarkably well last night; I suppose you consider that he is rapidly gaining strength.’

The Doctor gave her a keen glance.

‘I am sorry to tell you that I do not,’ he answered.

Mrs Gifford gave a little start.

‘You don’t mean to say you are not satisfied?’ she asked.

‘I am by no means satisfied.’

‘Oh, good gracious! don’t tell me that you dread another attack.’

‘No, I don’t dread anything of that sort, at least not at present; but there are other troubles which require immediate attention. The fact is this, Mrs Gifford, it

is necessary for me to talk over your husband's case most seriously with you.'

Mrs Gifford plumped down on the nearest chair.

'I am sure, Dr Watson,' she began, 'I am always willing to listen to you. I thought the Professor was doing very well; but no doubt I am not the slightest judge. Of course he had a really severe illness.'

'Apoplexy, my good madam; he was at death's door; we pulled him from the brink of the grave by a miracle—yes, I repeat it, by a miracle.'

'Well, I did not know he was so ill as that. Why do you interrupt me? you speak somehow as if it was my fault. What I was going to say is this, that as he has to be ill, it seems a sort of providential arrangement that it should take place during the long summer holidays; he will doubtless be quite well again in October.'

'That is just the point,' said Dr Watson; 'he will not.'

'Will not?' Mrs Gifford's flushed face grew perceptibly paler. 'Do you mean to tell me,' she asked, 'that the Professor will not be able to return to his duties in October?'

'No, Mrs Gifford. The illness through which he has just passed was of too serious a nature to make this possible. It was doubtless brought on by a variety of causes, but was mainly due to an overstrain of brain; your husband must not attempt to use his brain for a year.'

‘Merciful heavens! a year! But the Professorship won’t be kept open for him.’

‘If, Mrs Gifford, he begins to resume his ordinary duties within that time he will have another attack, and if he has another attack I cannot be responsible for the consequences.’

‘Then you wish to tell me’ —

‘I am sorry to have to tell you the truth. It is absolutely necessary that your husband should take a complete year’s holiday. He must leave this house at once, and go into the country; he ought to spend every scrap of the fine weather out of doors. If he were a rich man I should order him to winter abroad.’

‘But he is by no means rich; he has nothing in the world but his Professorship.’

‘I am sorry to hear that. Have you no private means? Forgive my asking you an abrupt question.’

‘Certainly I forgive you, Doctor; there is no use in not being quite frank with you. We have none of us any money except what my husband earns. His Professorship is worth a thousand a year; on that we all live. A thousand a year is not a large income in the present day.’

‘Not for your family,’ said the Doctor.

‘And as that is all we have,’ continued Mrs Gifford, ‘you must see for yourself that it is impossible for the Professor to take a year’s holiday.’

‘My dear madam, the impossibility does not lie on that side of the question at all; it is impossible for

your husband to do a stroke of real work before a year has gone by. Doubtless the Professorship could be kept open for a year, provided Mr Gifford finds a substitute.'

'Yes, but the other man would have to be paid, and we cannot live on a penny less than my husband's present income. I am quite willing to admit that under ordinary circumstances it might be best for Mr Gifford to take the long holiday, yet as we are situated'—

The Doctor fairly jumped from his seat.

'I throw up the case,' he said, 'if Mr Gifford resumes work before the time I have mentioned. He must go away immediately. I want you to remove him from this house within a week. I will do all in my power to help you, but you absolutely must get him into the country. You ought not to delay an hour. He grows weaker instead of stronger; his energies are less, his outlook on life narrower each hour that he spends in this vitiated air. Why don't you take the next train to Herne Bay and get rooms for yourself and your family this very day?'

At that moment Agnes entered the room.

'Come here, Agnes,' said her mother. 'I should like you to hear what Dr Watson has just been telling me.'

Agnes looked cool and pretty in her soft summer dress; she wore a white hat which was pushed back from her fair face.

'What is the matter?' she asked, looking at the Doctor, surprise in her tone.

Dr Watson raised his brows in irritation.

‘My good friends,’ he said, ‘you seem very much surprised at my stating manifest facts. I wonder, for my part, that you have not seen the condition of things for yourselves. I was just telling your mother, Miss Gifford, that your father has been given back to you from the brink of the grave. I assure you that at the height of his illness I had not the least idea that I could pull him through; he has been brought back to life as by a miracle, and now your mother thinks that he will be able to resume his ordinary work at the beginning of the autumn term. He must leave town immediately, and take a year’s holiday.’

‘Yes; and I am asking the Doctor what we are to do,’ said the mother.

‘You must just do what I tell you,’ said the Doctor; ‘you must take the Professor out of London within a few days. If you will be guided by me, he may be as well as ever in a year, and be able to resume his work; but if you don’t’—

‘Suppose we don’t,’ said Agnes, lowering her voice.

‘Then, Miss Gifford, he will have a second attack, from which he will not recover.’ The Doctor took up his hat as he spoke. A moment later he had left the house.

The moment they were alone, Mrs Gifford looked full at her daughter.

‘Here is a nice state of things, Aggie,’ she said; ‘now, what is to be done?’

‘Of course, mother,’ replied Agnes, ‘there is only one thing to be done; we must be guided by Dr Watson.’

‘I am certain he exaggerates,’ said the mother; ‘most doctors do; it is their profession; it makes them sound more important, and is in the long run the best thing for their own interests.’

‘I don’t think Dr Watson does exaggerate, mother. The fact is, one of my great friends, Sophy Burns, is studying medicine—you know Sophy, don’t you? Well, I met her only yesterday, and she was so much interested in father’s illness; she made me tell her all that I could about it, and afterwards she said exactly what Dr Watson has just said.’

‘What did she say, my dear?’

‘Oh, this: “Your father must have a year’s rest, Aggie,” said Sophy, “and you ought to take him out of London at once.”’

‘Then we shall all starve,’ cried Mrs Gifford; she sat down again, crossed her fat hands on her lap, and burst into a flood of tears.

‘But, mother, can’t you see for yourself that we should starve just as soon if father died?’

‘Dear me, child, you talk as if I were planning his death. Of course he must be saved at any cost; but still I state a fact: if he gives up work we shall starve. I suppose it is worth even going through starvation to save him. Anyhow, he must be saved; but’—

‘We may be very poor, but I don’t think it can be quite so bad as that,’ said Agnes.

‘I tell you that it is, Agnes; oh, I must speak out or my heart will burst. You know that your father was always a very careless man about money.’

‘I suppose so; I really don’t know much about it.’

‘Oh, but he was; you never knew anything like it. At one time he used to manage all the income, and just allow me so much; and, if you believe me, he would not even fill in the counterfoils of his cheques. He hadn’t the faintest idea how much he had in the bank. Everything was going to ruin; then I begged of him to give me his money as it was paid to him, and he consented, and ——

‘Well, mother, he could not do more than that,’ said Agnes.

‘No, and at first I thought it a good thing; but now I am by no means so sure; the fact is, my dear child, I spent the money, and there never seemed to be half enough. You know you and Rose wanted lots of dresses.’

‘Oh, mother, we were really economical, and after we learned scientific dressmaking we saved a good deal.’

‘Still, dear, it was always give, give, and there was not enough money; and now, Aggie, my child, I am heavily in debt.’

‘I feared this,’ said Agnes; ‘how very unpleasant. What do you mean by heavily in debt, mother?’

‘Well, I owe money in all directions. It is six months since I paid the butcher; I owe a heavy bill also at Fawcett’s, the grocer’s. Then the June quarter’s rent is a month overdue, and I heard from the landlord this morning. Oh, my dear, I hate to think of it all. A thousand a year is a very little sum to meet the claims of a household of this sort; and now it seems that that thousand is to be taken from us. What are we to do, Aggie?’

‘Poor mother,’ said Agnes, ‘I wish I could help you.’

‘My dear, you don’t know what a burden there is on my mind. Although I always try to be jolly before you children, I am so overpowered with anxiety that my nights are getting quite broken. There are the debts, and how are they to be met? Even if your father was quite well, and able to return to his work in October, and we were not obliged to have any special expense about him, things would be bad enough; but as they are——

‘Well, they are pretty desperate,’ said Agnes. ‘I had better go and fetch Rose; we must have a consultation right away.’

‘What good will Rose do?’ said Mrs Gifford, in a fretful voice; ‘she has got no money. The person we really ought to consult is some one with two or three hundred pounds to spare, who would lend it for a time, a few years, and charge very



Rose was helping Catty to fill some vases with flowers.

low interest. Of course, naturally, I should pay it back, and then matters might look a little less serious.'

'Well, all the same, I'll fetch Rose,' said Agnes, after some deliberation.

She left the room, and going up to Rose's bedroom, called her name. She was not there. Agnes considered again, and then softly opening the Professor's door, looked in. Rose and Catty were both with their father. The two girls were seated near one another, and Rose was helping Catty to fill some vases with flowers. The fair face and the dark one were bending close together; they made a beautiful picture; the Professor's shadowy face in the background seemed to complete it. He was feeling strangely happy just now; no care seemed to have the least power to touch him. He smiled when he saw Agnes, and called her name in that voiceless whisper which was more pathetic than his most impassioned speeches had ever been in his days of health.

'Dear father,' said Agnes; she bent down over him and kissed him. There was quite an unlooked-for tenderness in her tone. 'I will come back presently and sit with you for a little,' she said.—'Rose, mother wants you at once.'

'Well, I cannot go until I have finished arranging these flowers; there can be no hurry,' said Rose in her leisurely voice.

'Let her stay for a bit,' said the Professor; 'I see

very little of Rose. It pleases me to watch her; she arranges flowers with much grace.'

'Perhaps I will do instead,' said Catalina.

'Mother sent for Rose, but perhaps you would really be best,' answered Agnes, looking with much attention at her little sister. 'Come along, then, Catty, at once.'

The girls left the room together. When they got on the landing, Agnes put her arm round Catalina's waist; they both entered the drawing-room together.

'What in the world have you brought Catalina for?' said Mrs Gifford; 'she is no manner of use.'

'I don't agree with you, mother,' said Agnes. 'I think she will be a great deal of use. She knows just as much about things and has just as wise a head on her shoulders as Rose.'

'Father wanted Rose to stay with him,' said Catalina, 'and you know, mummy, if I can help you,' she added, 'I will.' She laid her little hand on her mother's shoulder as she spoke.

'Dear me, child,' said poor Mrs Gifford, 'goodness knows I want some one to help me just now. The fact is this, Catty, I am in awful trouble.'

'Oh mother, is it anything about father? Does, does the Doctor think——?'

Mrs Gifford gave an impatient exclamation.

'There you are as usual, jumping to conclusions,' she said. 'No, there is nothing special to alarm us about your father just now; he is going on as well

as I suppose he can go on, seeing that he has been so dangerously ill. I never did understand that his illness was so serious until Dr Watson spoke to-day.'

'Oh mother,' said Catty.

'You guessed it then, child?'

'Mother, I lived through it,' said the young girl in an intense voice.

Mrs Gifford gazed at her; Catalina was seldom in touch with her mother. Mrs Gifford failed altogether to comprehend her now.

'Catty may as well know the worst,' said Agnes; 'we can tell Rose afterwards. Father wished to keep her, and I thought Catty might as well know.'

'It is simply this,' said her mother: 'your father will never be well again'—

'Mother,' interrupted Catalina.

'Do let me finish what I was going to say, child; the Doctor says that your father will never be well again if he does not get a whole year's holiday. Goodness knows where the money is to come from, if the Professor is to be idle for a whole year. But of course Dr Watson thinks nothing at all about that; I never heard a man speak in such a determined, I might almost say rude, way; his tone quite seemed to imply that I was answerable for your father's bad illness. Nothing I could do or explain would get him to alter his verdict. The Professor must have a year's holiday, and must go into the country immediately.'

'I am very glad,' said Catalina; 'I know father

wants very different air from what he can get in Bloomsbury just now. I am glad Dr Watson has spoken.'

'That is all very fine for you; but tell me, pray, where the money is to come from?'

'The money,' said Catalina, in a vague way.

'Yes, for goodness' sake, don't stare at me. I repeat, where is the money to come from?'

'I really don't know, mother; I suppose out of the bank.'

Mrs Gifford jumped to her feet.

'Now Agnes,' she said, 'I put it to you, what was the use of bringing a child like that into the room? Really, Catty, you are worse than a baby. Suppose there is no money in the bank; then what is to be done?'

'But, mother, there must be,' said Catalina. 'Really, I am not the baby you seem to think me. I know, of course, that father is paid quarterly; he has two hundred and fifty pounds a quarter. There must be plenty of money in the bank.'

Mrs Gifford wrung her hands in despair.

'I have something more to say,' she continued. 'Take it for granted at once, Catalina, that there is not fifty pounds in the bank; no, nor thirty. Take this also as a fact which has got to be met—how it is to be met, Heaven only knows—that I owe at this moment between three and four hundred pounds to the tradespeople round this place.'

‘You owe money, mother; mother, you are in debt?’
Catalina’s tone was full of extreme horror.

‘Yes, miss, I am in debt, heavily in debt; and there is something like thirty, perhaps thirty-five, pounds in the bank to meet it all. Now, when you have realised that, you will perhaps begin to understand what I feel when I am told that your father must have a year’s holiday, and must leave town immediately.’

Catalina did not reply at once. She walked to one of the windows, half hid her little figure behind an ugly drab curtain, and looked drearily out. The problem which was given to her to solve was a large one; it was impossible for her to take it in in all its bearings, nevertheless it staggered her, and brought a perplexed expression not good to see on so young a face.

‘I must say that sometimes doctors talk rubbish,’ muttered Mrs Gifford, beginning to pace up and down in front of the fireplace.

Her attitude, and the way she walked up and down, reminded Catalina of the dreadful day when she had come home just before the Professor’s illness.

‘There is one thing we ought not to forget,’ said Catty, facing round suddenly as she spoke. ‘God has been wonderfully good to us. He has spared father; and if he is quite well in a year—oh, surely it is worth giving him the chance, even if we do have to live on very little money.’

‘But I tell you, child, there will be *no* money to live on. Even your father would not get well if there was no money at all. Something must be done, and what that something is, I cannot tell.’

‘There is Uncle James; would not he do something?’ said Catalina suddenly.

‘I would not ask him for all the world.’

‘But why not, mother? He has plenty of money, has he not?’

‘Plenty of money—I should rather think he has. He is one of the richest calico merchants in Manchester—my only brother too; but he and I quarrelled when I married the Professor, and from that day to this—’

‘Oh, I know,’ interrupted Catalina; ‘you told me the story, don’t you remember, about a month ago?’ She moved restlessly; her mind was full of active thought.

‘I think, mother, you ought to go to him,’ she said again; ‘at least you ought to write and ask him.’

‘I wish I dared, but I don’t. He is a very queer man. When long ago I fell in love with the Professor he was poor, and there was, I don’t mind your knowing it now, girls, another man whom my brother wanted me to marry. I was engaged to the other man, and I threw him over for the Professor, and he was my brother’s friend, and my brother was furious. From that day to now he has taken no notice of me, and I have been too proud ever to remind him of my

existence. I used to think myself, as the wife of the Professor, in a much better social position than my rich brother, who had only made his money in trade; but, children, that was all nonsense, sheer nonsense. Oh, the state I am in now; how James would crow over me now if he knew. He would say, "I told you so, Rose." How dreadful it is when people say "I told you so."

'Well, but look here, mother,' said Catalina, 'the thing to consider is whether there is the least use in applying to Uncle James.'

'Child, there is no use; don't waste your thoughts nor my time considering the matter.'

'But, mother, I think there is use; it seems to me it is the one only chance. If you are afraid to see him, I am not. Where did you say he lived?'

'In Manchester, of course.'

'Give me my fare to Manchester, and I will go and see him.'

'Catty, what in the world do you mean?'

'I can but fail, but I don't think I will. Give me a third-class fare to Manchester and back, and I will go straight off to see him. I can go early to-morrow.'

'You talk utter nonsense. I could not hear of it.'

'Well, mother, it would be better for you to go yourself; but if you will not, let me. I am not at all afraid. After all, he can but refuse; but somehow I don't think he will. If I go to see him I will tell him all about father; I will let him know what sort

of man father really is. Perhaps he will be willing to help us. Do, mummy, let me try.'

'You are an extraordinary child,' said Agnes; 'do you mean to say that you would have the courage?'

'It is not a question of courage, it is a matter of necessity,' said Catalina. 'I wish mother would go herself; but if she will not, I will.'

'I can't and won't, so that's flat,' said Mrs Gifford.

'Well, then, I can and must,' said Catalina. 'Do you know, mother, what a third-class fare to Manchester will be?'

'You cannot do it, child; it is not to be thought of.'

'Mother, I will do it.'

'It is the wildest folly; then, too, you could not travel alone.'

Catalina could not help laughing.

'Why not?' she said. 'I am not a baby. Some one could see me into the train here, and I shall know very well what to do when I get to Manchester. I shall simply have to get into a cab and drive straight to Uncle James's office.'

'You are the most extraordinary girl I ever heard of in my life,' said Mrs Gifford. She looked Catalina up and down as she spoke.

'Go away, Catty, now,' said Agnes; 'mother and I will talk this over. If there is anything in your suggestion, we can let you know.'

Catalina left the room; she went straight upstairs to her own attic, opened the window, flung herself on

her knees by it, and began to summon up all the courage and resolution of her eager heart.

‘I will go,’ she said to herself; ‘it is the one only chance. Father must have this year’s rest; he must get into the country immediately. If Uncle James is rich, and if I tell him just how things really are, I feel certain that he will help us. I will put the matter just as plain as plain can be. I know I shall have courage when the time comes. Oh yes, I must, I will go.’

Meanwhile, Mrs Gifford was speaking to Agnes.

‘That child’s idea is not worth a moment’s consideration,’ she said.

‘I don’t know as to that, mother; Catty has wonderful courage; she is not like any of the rest of us.’

‘She takes after her grandmother, who was a remarkable woman,’ said Mrs Gifford. ‘Well, I repeat, her suggestion is not worth considering. I should not dream of sparing the money to send her on this wild-goose chase.’

‘And what do you mean to do at the present moment, mother?’

‘Well, this: whether your father lives or dies, whether he has his year’s holiday or resumes his work at the beginning of next session, whether we stay here or go into the country, we must eat for the time being; and we can’t eat if Gray and Thompson refuse to supply us with bread and meat.’

‘Things have not become so bad as that?’ asked Agnes.

‘Yes, but they have. I have had letters, most impudent letters, from both of them this morning. It is really disgraceful, and we such good customers.’

‘Well, mother, what do you intend to do?’

‘Oh, pay them something on account; that is what I was going to speak to you about. I shall give them each a cheque for five pounds; that will reduce my banking-account to goodness knows how little.’

‘Mother, don’t you know exactly what you have in the bank?’

‘No, my love; only that it is terribly little.’

‘Well, then, mother, let me do something also. I will go straight off to the bank and find out exactly how your balance now stands. I shall have plenty of time between now and dinner, and you in the meantime can take cheques to Gray and Thompson. I think too, mother, that you had better let me draw a couple of pounds, for that idea of Catalina’s does not seem to me half bad.’

‘I tell you it is utter nonsense,’ said Mrs Gifford angrily; ‘if anybody knows my brother, surely I ought to. Do you suppose for a moment he would listen to a word a conceited little thing like Catalina said to him?’

‘There is no saying, mother, and it is a last chance. If I were you I should let her try it. She is a very brave child, and very uncommon; he might listen to her if he would not to you.’

‘Well, Agnes, I can’t waste time talking over this now. Go to the bank and get particulars with regard to my account, while I hurry off to pacify those two ogres. Oh, why are tradespeople so unreasonable?’

Agnes could not refrain from a laugh, which had very little merriment in it.

‘Bakers and butchers must live like the rest of us,’ she said, ‘and if they are never paid’——

‘Oh, don’t begin to moralise now, my dear; there is something terribly wrong somewhere. Well, I am off; just see that your father has his beef-tea before you go out, Agnes.’

Agnes left the room, and soon afterwards started on her mission to the bank. Mrs Gifford also went out. Rose, unconscious of any special storm, sat tranquilly with her father, and found the minutes flying by not unpleasantly while she read aloud to him Victor Hugo’s *Toilers of the Sea*. She read the novel in the original French, and with a pretty accent. The Professor listened and found the time pass quickly. He was living in a dream-world, and had not in reality come back to the everyday earth; he was still in the borderland, and the strange sights, sounds, and experiences of that shadowy country filled his horizon. There was, in short, a glass between him and the real working world; nothing could now make him anxious, nothing could now make him really unhappy; no cares oppressed him—he was content to drift, and the drifting was not in the direction of life.

When Rose saw Catty she immediately closed the book, and a moment afterwards left the room. Catalina sat down on the floor by her father's side; she took up the *Toilers of the Sea*, and tried to busy herself over its pages. Between her and the written words, however, there came the terrible verdict of the Doctor; the awful knowledge that they had no money, and that her mother was heavily in debt, seemed to fill all her horizon. Catalina knew vaguely that this sort of thing ought not to be; she knew that her father toiled quite sufficiently hard to keep his family out of all mere money difficulties. She was too loyal, however, to blame her mother; she only felt something of the true spirit of the knight-errant within her; if it might be her privilege to turn the key in this difficult lock, if she might be the one to bring order out of this chaos. Oh yes, she would be the one, she would have no fear. Dreadful as Uncle James might be, she would beard this ogre in his den.

CHAPTER X.

THE JOURNEY TO MANCHESTER.



INCE his illness Mr Gifford went to bed early. On this particular evening, when he was settled for the night, Catalina stole softly downstairs—her mind was now absolutely made up. Her character was much stronger than her mother's, and she felt sure that she should win the day. She would get her mother's consent; she would really start for Manchester on the following morning. She peeped into the dining-room; Mrs Gifford was not there. She explored the rest of the house, and finally discovered her parent having an angry discussion with Alice in the kitchen. Alice was out of coals, and Mrs Gifford refused to allow any more to be ordered. Her voice rose high and sharp; she was accusing Alice of burning the coals a great deal too quickly. Alice, with a still redder face, was on the point of giving notice to leave, when Catty's eager, little dark face appeared on the scene.

‘Mother, can I speak to you?’

‘Well, no, Catty, unless it is anything very special.’

‘It is—it is of the utmost importance—I want to see you at once.’

‘How troublesome and positive you are. Well, go upstairs to the dining-room and wait for me there.’

Catty turned to leave. Mrs Gifford looked full at Alice.

‘I shall get in coals by the hundredweight,’ she said; ‘you waste them. It is beyond all reason that the last ton should have been used up so quickly.’ She turned as she spoke and followed Catty very slowly upstairs.

The moment she got into the dining-room, Catalina ran forward, took her mother’s hand, pulled her forward, and pushed her down into an easy chair.

‘Now, then, mother,’ she said, ‘I have settled everything in my own mind.’

‘Good gracious! Catty, what about? How terribly excited you look! what have you settled?’

‘Why, everything about my journey to-morrow.’

‘Your journey to-morrow! well, what next?’

‘Oh, mother, you know I am going—you know there is no other way out of the difficulty; you may as well say “Yes” first as last, mummy, for I really am quite determined.’

‘You are an extraordinary child; at times I think there is something not quite canny about you. How dare you set up your opinion in contradistinction to your mother’s!’

‘I don’t, mother, really; but when there’s nothing

else to do. Oh, please listen. I have found an old A B C, and I looked up the trains. A very good train leaves for Manchester at 7.15 in the morning; it gets there at 11.55. Mother, I mean to take that train. I am going to-morrow morning to Manchester to see Uncle James. If I am lucky, and really have an interview with him, I may be able to return to London by the train which leaves Manchester at 3. Then, by this time to-morrow night! Oh, think of it, mummy'—Catalina broke off here abruptly; her eyes began to sparkle—'Oh, if I only succeed, how happy, how splendid, we will feel by this time to-morrow night!'

'Well, you are a queer child,' said Mrs Gifford. 'There is no denying that it would be a comfort if your uncle James would put matters straight for us now, and of course he would not feel it; the money which would make us so comfortable would never be missed by him. It is brave of you, of course, to offer to go; but your bravery is caused by ignorance—you have not the least idea what my brother really is.'

'Please describe him, mother, you who know him so well. Tell me what he is like.'

'As obstinate as a mule,' said Mrs Gifford. 'When he takes the bit between his teeth nothing living can alter him; not all the tears, not all the coaxings in the world can move him one inch out of his own way—he is a pragmatical, determined, obstinate man. Oh, of course he is good enough—

I have no fault to find with him on that score; but if you could guess the scenes he and I have had, and how he always on every occasion won the victory, you would not have much courage to put yourself into the lion's den now, and that I can tell you.'

Catalina's face became a little paler as her mother was speaking.

'I am going anyhow,' she said. 'I am sorry he is as bad as you describe him, but I can but fail.'

'Well, it will cost a good deal of money,' said Mrs Gifford. 'Even third-class cannot be done for nothing, Catalina. You had much better give it up; it is quite a wild-goose chase.'

'Mother, I am going. As to travelling third-class, of course I should not dream of going in any other way. I am not afraid; I am nearly fifteen. Why should not I do this? I would do a good deal more than this to help father, and to help you, mummy,' she continued, fixing her bright eyes on her mother as she spoke.

Mrs Gifford's own eyes filled with tears.

'Come to me, Catty,' she said; 'you really are an extraordinary child. When I look at you I feel impelled to believe in you. Oh, it is utter nonsense trusting to the strength of a mere child; but still somehow you are not like the others. You were wonderfully brave when your father was so ill; I believe you love him very much.'

‘Oh mother, you know,’ said Catalina. Her voice sank almost to a whisper.

‘Yes, child, I know. Well, who would suppose that a little thing like you, the youngest girl in the house, should be willing to put her head into the lion’s den.’

‘Mother, the lion cannot bite off my head. Oh, I assure you I am not a scrap afraid.’

‘You will be when the time comes; he is a terrible man, is James, to oppose. You will see that when the time comes.’

‘At least I won’t think of it beforehand. I will just remember all about father, and I’ll think of your poor, tired, worried face, and of the house, and of the money that is wanted so badly, and, in short, of all that success means and of all that failure means. I am just determined not to fail. Please give me the money for my fare, mother.’

‘It is madness all the same,’ said Mrs Gifford, ‘but still’—

‘Still, you will let me try it. That train which leaves King’s Cross at 7.15 in the morning is a very good one. I am almost safe to return home to-morrow night. See, mother, here are the fares: 15s. 5d. third-class; double that, return.’

‘Yes, it is an awful lot of money,’ said Mrs Gifford; ‘it will cost more than thirty shillings, and then you have to get to King’s Cross, you know, Catty.’

‘If the morning is fine I can walk.’

‘But you never were at King’s Cross in your life.’

‘No, mother, but I can easily ask my way; and when I get there, porters have tongues, have they not? Please, mother, trust me—just think of what it means—just think of what will happen if I don’t go.’

‘You need not ask me to think of that,’ said Mrs Gifford; ‘it is never out of my head one moment day or night. Sometimes I think my poor brain will turn. Agnes brought dreadful news back from the bank. How much do you think is now left to my account? Only fifteen pounds; just you reflect on what that means, Catty.’

‘I cannot, mother, for I don’t really understand the value of money. I only know by your face that we shall all starve, and father will die if something is not added to that fifteen pounds. I am the one to see about that; I am to be your good angel, mummy; I am to be the one to overcome the dragon in his den. Oh mother, I feel something like St George of England. Please, dear mother, give me the money.’

‘It will take almost all of the precious two sovereigns I drew out of the bank to-day,’ said Mrs Gifford.

‘But think what a rich return it will bring,’ said Catalina, kissing her on her cheek. ‘Now you will trust me, won’t you?’

‘I will, you dear, strange, brave child.’ Mrs Gifford suddenly and completely broke down; she flung her arms round Catty’s neck, and let her head rest for an instant on the child’s shoulder. Lying so,

she could hear Catty's heart beating. But Catty herself stood brave and firm ; she shed no tears, nor did she tremble ; she kissed her mother two or three times, and pushed back the faded hair, and patted her flushed cheek, and presently the poor woman, sinking into a chair, drew Catty to sit down by her side, and began to open out her heart to her.

' You are like your grandmother,' she said ; ' you are not the least bit like me. Your grandmother was a very steadfast, strong, beautiful woman ; she managed all the housekeeping. When she died I took the reins into my hands, and then we began to get into trouble. I never could quite live within our income, and so the dreadful debts began. I wonder, child, when you grow up, if you will be as strong and beautiful as your grandmother was.'

' I hope so, mother. I always like to hear about her.'

' I have a miniature of her upstairs,' said Mrs Gifford ; ' it is set round with pearls (by the way, I have no doubt that the frame would sell for something ; that's a good thought)—well, I'll show you the miniature some day. I can easily slip it out of its setting. And now, my love, as you have to be up so early, had you not better go to bed ?'

Catalina scarcely slept that night : her mind kept going over and over her coming interview with her uncle ; her heart was still beating too fast to allow her to get any feeling of rest. She knew well that until she

had accomplished the task she had set herself she could not hope to know a quiet moment.

'It is just like being in the thick of the battle,' she thought; 'but I am glad I have got something really very hard to do for father's sake.'

She got up soon after six on the following morning, and went downstairs. The morning happened to be a lovely one; the sun shone brightly in at the windows. When Catty reached the dining-room the first person she met was her mother.

'Why, mummy, what have you got up for?'

'Well, child, I hope I am not quite heartless. Did you think I would let you go off by yourself, you poor little mite. No, not I. See, I have put the kettle on the gas jet to boil; I am going to give you a couple of nice fresh eggs for your breakfast, and a cup of cocoa—it is more nourishing than tea or coffee.'

'I am really not at all hungry. How is father this morning?'

'He is asleep at present; he spent a very fair night.'

'Mother, you look tired yourself.'

'My love, I am about done, and that's a fact. I need the rest and the freedom from care as sorely as your father does. Oh Catty, child, suppose you fail!'

'Suppose I succeed,' said Catty brightly.

'I cannot imagine why I am such a fool as to let you go.'

‘Well, mother, I have got the money now,’ said Catty, ‘and I assure you I am not going to give it back to you. You shall have it back, and with interest, by-and-by ; but until then —

Mrs Gifford made the cocoa and boiled the eggs.

‘Eat up your bread and butter, child,’ she said ; ‘get as good a breakfast into you as you possibly can.’

‘Mother, I wish I were hungry, but I am not. I wish you would not wait on me ; it does not seem right.’

‘I like to do it, child ; the fact is I am too restless to sit still. Catty, I mean to go with you to King’s Cross.’

‘Do you, really ? How nice, how sweet of you ! Now I will confess something. I did feel rather nervous at the idea of going to King’s Cross by myself.’

‘Poor child. Well, your mother is at least good for that much. Now, Catalina, tie on your cape, and let us start.’

They left the house together. The air outside was deliciously fresh. Catalina felt full of hope ; she began to skip as she walked.

‘I had better tell you all I can about your uncle,’ said Mrs Gifford, as they got over the ground.

‘Please do, mother. I really know little or nothing about him. All I am certain of at the present moment is, that his name is James Ellworthy ; that

he is rich, and that he lives somewhere in Manchester.'

'He is one of the richest calico merchants in the city,' said Mrs Gifford. 'I have no doubt that he makes thousands and thousands every year.'

'Is he married, mother? Has he little girls of his own?'

'He is married, and I believe he has one child.'

'Only one, mother?'

'I never heard of any more; but really I know so little about him that I cannot be quite certain. I think he has a girl, and she must be something about your age.'

'Then perhaps I shall meet her; that would be nice. In what part of Manchester does my uncle live? I ought to know that, ought I not?'

'Well, my dear, he used to live in one of the big squares. I think Donville Square was the name; but for all I know he may have moved into quite another part by now. That will show you, will it not, how very little communication I have had with him all these years?'

'Of course, mother.'

'It is just as if I had no brother. It seems too extraordinary and dreadful that I should apply to him now in my need.'

'You are not applying to him, mother. I am doing that, remember.'

'Yes, yes; be sure you make him understand that.'

It would never do for him to think that I had to eat humble-pie to him. Be sure you get him plainly to know that it was all your thought, Catty.'

'Yes, mother, certainly.'

'You are very plucky.'

'Don't praise me any more, or I shall get conceited,' said Catalina. 'Had we not better step out a little faster, mother, I am so afraid of being late?'

'We have plenty of time, my love. By the way, Catalina, you are dressed in your very best; is it not a pity to wear that nice hat and cape going a long, dusty, railway journey?'

'I must look my best, mother. It is important that I should appear as well dressed as possible when I go to see my uncle. You see I want to call all my powers into play.'

'All your powers, child. Now, what do you mean?'

'My powers of eloquence,' said Catalina. 'And also the power that looking nice can give a girl! Oh, I am certain, mother, people are much more apt to be kind if you look nice.'

'Beautiful, you mean,' said Mrs Gifford suddenly.

Catalina blushed and turned away her head.

'Are you vain enough to think yourself beautiful?' said her mother.

'I am not vain about it, mother,' answered Catalina.

They soon reached the great railway station. Catty

bought a return third-class ticket for herself, and held it up gleefully to her mother to examine.

‘Now the deed is done,’ she said, with a smile. They crossed the bridge and approached the platform where the train for Manchester was waiting to receive its passengers. Catalina chose a corner in an empty third-class carriage. She seated herself, and her mother stood by her side. Soon afterwards the carriage began to fill; one or two rough-looking farmers took their places in the opposite corners, then a motherly woman got in with a large basket, then a couple of girls, very little older than Catalina.

‘Oh, my poor child, I have given you nothing to eat on your journey,’ said her mother; ‘and of course you’ll want something to read.’

‘I have too much to think about to care to read,’ answered Catalina in a whisper; then she added, ‘and I have had an excellent breakfast, and am not a scrap hungry.’

‘But you will be, before you get to Manchester.’

‘No, indeed, I will not. I want to look at the country; remember a railway journey is a great treat to me.’

‘I cannot let you go without something,’ said Mrs Gifford. She hurried away, and presently returned with a bath bun in a bag, which she thrust into Catalina’s hands. Just as the guard came up to shut and lock the door, Mrs Gifford eagerly put in her face at the window.

'I forgot to tell you, Catalina, your uncle's business address ; it is somewhere in Curzon Street ; Ell-worthy & Co., Calico Printers. I cannot give you a clearer address than that ; but doubtless any cabman will know the number. Good-bye, my dear child. God bless you.'

The great train moved slowly out of the station ; soon it quickened its speed, and Catalina found herself flying through the country. She leant back in her seat ; a feeling of rest stole over her. She had won her point, she had really started on her journey ; nothing in all the world could now alter that fact. Whether she succeeded or failed, her great mission lay straight before her. She had time now to examine her fellow-passengers ; the certainty that she must go through the task which she had set herself made her feel quite cool, and even gave her a sense of leisure. She noticed that the woman who sat opposite to her stared at her a good deal. She was a good-natured, fairly stout, comfortable body of between forty and fifty years of age. Her basket seemed to occupy a good deal of her attention ; she often opened it, and dipped her hand in to extract a sandwich or a piece of chocolate or something else in the edible line. After partaking of light refreshments of this sort, she would close the basket, look out of the window, glance at Catty, and then fix her eyes lovingly on the basket again ; suddenly, after about the fifth time of opening, Catalina saw a bag of chocolates being lifted out of

its receptacle; the next minute it was thrust under her nose.

'Pray, take a chocolate, my little lady,' said the woman; 'I can recommend them as first-rate; they are made by my daughter. You taste one, please, miss; you never ate anything better in the whole course of your life.'

Catty was not inclined for chocolates just then; but seeing a wistful, eager expression in the woman's eyes, she dipped her hand into the bag and took one.

'It is quite delicious,' she said, after she had eaten it. 'Do you mean to tell me that your daughter made it?'

'Yes, indeed she did, my dear;' the woman smiled now all over her motherly face. 'Ain't it prime good stuff? My daughter Lottie, she attended a big school of cookery, and there's no end to the good things she can make. It's fairly wonderful what girls will do in these days to support theirselves.'

'Does your daughter really support herself?' asked Catalina, interested immediately.

'I should think she just does. Why, she ain't cost me a penny for close on three years.'

'Is she grown up?'

'Well, she ain't to say old; but she is past seventeen.'

'And she has supported herself for nearly three years?'

‘Yes, miss, that she has. She took it into her head that she would not be a burden on me soon after her fourteenth birthday; she had always a turn for cooking, bless her. I have a brother in the confectionery line; and nothing would serve Lottie but she must go to ‘im, and ask ‘im if he wouldn’t learn her how to make fancy dishes and light puff pastry and all the rest; but Peter couldn’t be bothered with her, so then, do you think she gave it up? Not a bit of it; she come to me, and coaxed me that I couldn’t rest, to let her join cookery classes. Oh, I was unwilling enough, for she was nothing but a child; but she wouldn’t listen to me. She seemed to pick up cooking as if by magic, and when she come home in the evening she would be trying on her experiments, and beautiful they did taste too. Then, when she knew a little more, she went back to her uncle and showed ‘im all she had done, and he was fairly delighted. He has took her on regular, and she makes all kinds of wonderful dishes, and he has quite a run on his cakes and chocolates. He pays her well now for her services. It’s giving me money, not I giving it to her, she has been doing for close on three years.’

‘No wonder you are proud of her,’ said Catalina.
‘How happy she must be!’

‘Yes, poor child, she is that,’ said the mother.
‘She is about the best girl a woman ever had. She did take on the burden of life, it is true, when she was full young; but bless you, miss, it ain’t done her no

harm. You try one o' these little cocoa-nut rocks, now, miss. Lottie made 'em for me last night, and first-rate they are.'

'So they are,' said Catalina, biting at one with great contentment. 'I am sure you must be awfully proud of your daughter,' she added.

'Well, to be sure,' said the woman, 'I thank the Almighty for giving me such a good child.' She sank back into her own seat as she spoke. Catalina went on biting bits off the cocoa-nut rock; it was quite the best she had ever tasted. She thought a good deal of Lottie and her clever way for supporting herself as the train moved rapidly on its way.

'You're going on a visit, ain't you, miss?' said the woman presently. 'You are young-like to be leaving home, and travelling so far by yourself.'

'I am going to Manchester,' said Catalina.

'Well, and Manchester is a good step from London; it's a long way for a little miss to be going all by herself.'

'I enjoy it very much,' said Catalina.

'That was your ma that saw you off, worn't it, miss?'

'Yes.'

'You must have felt sore at saying good-bye to her. You'll be away a good while, I guess?' The woman looked curiously at the child as she spoke. She did not fail to notice that Catalina carried no railway-rug nor any luggage, as far as she could see.

'I am only going for a very short time,' said Catalina. 'I want, if possible, to return home to-day.'

The woman threw up her hands.

'My word, now, you don't mean that,' she cried. 'You cannot intend to tell me that you'll travel to Manchester and back the same day?'

'I hope I shall be able to do so. I am wanted at home very badly.'

'Well, now, to be sure; you do look a thoughtful, handy sort of child, although you wear your hair in a bush, and ain't, so to speak, so tidy as you might be; but to go to Manchester, and to come back the same day—it beats belief. Did I hear you say, miss, or was I mistook, that you were on a visit to Mr Ell-worth?'

'Yes; do you know him?' asked Catalina, with a start.

'Know 'im, miss? 'tain't likely that a poor woman like me would know one like 'im; of course I know of 'im. Are you related now, miss?'

'I am his niece,' said Catalina.

When she said this the farmers at the opposite side of the carriage bent forward to give the little girl a critical and somewhat admiring glance. As to the woman opposite, she gazed at Catalina with a great increase of respect.

'Lor'! to think o' that,' she said. She drew back her dress in order that it should not come into contact with such a very aristocratic young lady.

‘James Ellworthy is the richest merchant in Manchester,’ she said presently.

‘He is my uncle,’ said Catalina, ‘but I don’t happen’—she blushed—‘I have never met him yet,’ she continued.

‘My word, how glad he’ll be to see a bonny little lady like yourself.’

‘I hope he will,’ said Catalina. ‘Have you ever seen him, Mrs—’

‘Perry is my name, dear.’

‘Have you ever seen him driving about, or met him anywhere, Mrs Perry?’

‘Scores of times have I seen him, love, driving past in his carriage. The brougham in winter with a pair of greys, and the landau in summer with a pair of chestnuts. My own people are all Manchester born and bred; but the Ellworthys are sort o’ princes in the place; their riches is past believing.’

‘Did you notice his face when you saw him driving past in the carriage?’ said Catalina, a timid note coming into her voice.

Mrs Perry instantly screwed up her eyes with a sharp expression.

‘A poor relation, I guess,’ she murmured under her breath. ‘Now, I wonder what the poor little miss does want with him.’

‘You would like me to tell you what sort of face he has?’ she continued. ‘How could I tell when he

passed me by like a flash; but people say of 'im'—

'Yes. What do people say?'

'They say he's a 'ard man, like most of those to whom the Almighty entrusts riches.'

'Hard,' murmured Catalina. She lowered her eyes; her heart sank like lead within her. She thought she had better not question any further. She leant back against her seat, and wished she had secured a newspaper or some book to hide her burning face from the inquisitive gaze of the woman who sat opposite to her. She was suddenly startled by hearing a man at the opposite end of the carriage address her.

'You'll pardon me, miss,' he cried. 'But if you want to know anything about Ellworthy, the calico merchant, I can tell you summat. I have known Ellworthy most of the time since I was a lad. He's 'ard, no doubt; but ef he's 'ard, he's straight, straight as a die. Any one who tells the simple truth to Ellworthy, and ain't afeard to stick up to it—why, he ain't half a bad sort. That's my opinion, miss, and I know 'im well.'

'Thank you,' answered Catalina. The colour returned to her face, and tears lay very near her eyes.

'I have got my clue at last,' she whispered to herself. 'I must just tell the simple truth.'

By-and-by the train reached Manchester. It puffed into the huge station; the porters flung open the

carriage-doors, and Catalina, with the rest of her fellow-passengers, stepped on to the platform. She stood there for a moment in absolute bewilderment; the train happened to be a particularly full one, and several people had come to meet friends and relations whom they were expecting. It appeared to the poor little girl that all in that crowd had some person to welcome them and to give them a word of greeting except herself. The man who had spoken to her about her uncle, for instance, was immediately clutched by two tall, well-made girls who proceeded to hug and kiss him, and then to hang on to either of his arms. Mrs Perry was accosted by a woman so like herself that Catalina concluded she must be her sister. Mrs Perry immediately offered the contents of her basket to the woman, and Catalina heard her mention the wonderful Lottie's name. All her fellow-passengers had forgotten her; she stood alone. A porter came up and touched his cap.

‘Any luggage, miss?’ he asked; ‘can I do anything for you?’

‘I have no luggage, but will you please fetch me a cab,’ said the little girl.

‘You had best follow me, miss; I’ll take you straight out to the cab-stand.’

Catalina went with him; a few moments later she found herself seated in a hansom. The porter bent forward.

‘What address, miss?’ he asked.

'Ellworthy & Co., Calico Printers, Curzon Street,' said Catalina.

This was shouted to the driver, who immediately whipped up his horse, and Catalina found herself driving rapidly through the crowded town.

'Certainly, without any doubt, I am the most daring girl in the world,' thought the child. 'Well, I am in for the whole thing now. What will Uncle James think of me? I have no time now to consider; I daren't get frightened. I must do it or die.'

The streets were very noisy and very crowded. The people, to Catalina's unaccustomed eyes, seemed far rougher than the London folks. She was too much preoccupied to notice the fine buildings, the solid aspect of the centre of the city. She drove down wide streets, the horse dashed quickly round corners, she was whirled through one or two imposing-looking squares, and at last found herself in a narrow street which seemed even more crowded than its fellows. Beautiful as the day was, the entire place had a hazy, smoky aspect. Catalina remembered afterwards that this was the smoke from the factories which, rising ever and ever on the air, rested just above the city in a continual cloud. This cloud shut away most of the sunshine and affected the little girl's spirits in spite of herself. The cab suddenly drew up with a jerk, and Catalina knew that she was outside her uncle's office. She got out tremblingly, and landed with somewhat shaky legs on the pavement.

She paid her fare. After doing so, her little purse contained nothing whatever but the return half of her ticket. She hid this for greater safety in the bosom of her dress, and then looked around her, up and down the street. There were a great many men about, but in that one glance she did not see a single woman. She suddenly felt very lonely and a tiny bit afraid; she would have given half the world for the touch of a sympathising hand. If only Mrs Perry were here, poor Mrs Perry, whom she had never met before that morning. After all, had she not done a silly thing? had she not been too daring? No, no; a sudden vision rose before her. She saw the Professor—he was lying back on his white pillows, his face as white as the pillow against which he leant; she noticed the queer far-away expression in his eyes; she seemed to see him sinking down a little nearer, and a little nearer, to the other world, day by day and hour by hour.

‘I am here and I will do my duty,’ thought the child. ‘The cords of love must draw my father back again to life. Oh yes, anything is worth doing with such a motive as mine.’

She turned abruptly, entered the large office through swinging glass doors, and the next instant found herself in a large room fitted up with desks. Here several men were sitting busily writing. Catalina went timidly forward.

C H A P T E R X I

BEARDING THE OGRE.



HERE was a moment's pause in the big room when so unusual a visitor put in an appearance; then a young man, with red hair and a disagreeable smirk on his face, rose slowly from his desk and went to meet the stranger.

When he did this, all the other clerks put their pens behind their ears and stared very hard at Catalina. She knew, without quite recognising the fact, that many pairs of eyes were fixed on her face. The red-haired clerk asked her in a half-familiar, half-friendly way, if he could do anything for her.

'I want to see Mr Ellworthy,' she replied.

'Ellworthy; do you mean the chief, miss?' asked the young man.

'I want to see Mr James Ellworthy,' repeated Catalina. 'Is he here?'

'Of course he is here,' said the clerk; 'this is his head office. May I ask, miss, if you have an appointment with him?'

'No, I have not an appointment,' replied Catalina,

'but I am his niece,' she added suddenly. 'I have just come from London on purpose to see him. Will you tell him that I am here, and will you ask him if he can spare me a few minutes of his time?'

'Ellworthy's niece,' said the red-haired clerk, turning abruptly on his heel, and, glancing at all his fellow-clerks, he smiled; the other clerks put on glances of different degrees of significance—they amused themselves for a full minute looking at Catalina. The rose bloom came out on her cheeks under their gaze, and her little face became full of strange and wonderful beauty.

A gray-haired man at the end of the room came forward at this moment.

'What is your name, miss?' he asked.

'Catalina Gifford.'

'Will you follow me into this room, Miss Gifford,' said the clerk. 'Gentlemen, I think you had better return to your duties.' The clerks, especially the red-haired clerk, scowled at the elderly man, and bent their heads once more over their uncongenial tasks. Catalina, with the roses on her cheeks and that half-defiant, half-daring light in her eyes, was quite an interesting study to them. Mr Ellworthy's niece, too! They knew a good deal about him, but had never heard before that he possessed a niece.

'Take a chair, my dear,' said the gray-haired man, in a kindly voice. He had shown Catalina into a tiny

room at the back of the big office. He pulled out an arm-chair for her.

‘Will you give me the exact message you wish me to convey to Mr Ellworthy?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ said Catalina. ‘Please tell him that I am his niece, Catalina Gifford; that I have come from London on very special business.’

‘Do you mean to tell me that you came from London this morning?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you have no appointment?’

‘No.’

‘Your uncle does not expect you?’

‘No, indeed, he does not; I don’t believe that he even knows that I exist.’

‘Well, miss, I will take him your message, but I doubt if he will see you. He is very busy just now, and dislikes, I mean he never allows, any of his family to call here; but, of course, I will give him your message, Miss Gifford.’ The man looked very fixedly at Catalina as he spoke; he had a kind, fatherly sort of face. He slowly left the room.

Catalina’s heart beat very hard; she called all her courage to her aid.

‘If I get nervous now, if I lose my head, all will be lost,’ she murmured to herself. ‘All must not be lost. I will not fear; the thought of father will keep my courage up.’

‘Follow me, please, miss,’ said the elderly clerk,

coming back. ‘Mr Ellworthy will see you for a moment.’

Catalina rose at once. The clerk took her into a wide, cool passage; they walked to the farther end where a lift awaited them; they got in and were instantly raised to the next floor. Then the clerk took Catalina down another broad passage; they passed through some swinging doors, and found themselves outside one made of massive oak. The clerk tapped in a respectful manner, and then slowly opened the door. Catalina had a vision of a splendidly but heavily furnished room; it looked large, cool, somewhat dark and very lofty; her little feet sank into the pile of a rich Turkey carpet. A tall man, with bushy whiskers, a somewhat bald head, dark eyes, and a stern cast of face, was standing on the hearth-rug; he looked very big, very unapproachable. Catalina glanced anxiously round for the friendly face of the clerk; he was gone.

‘Your name and your business, little girl?’ said the tall man.

‘I am Catalina Gifford; please are you Mr Ellworthy?’

‘James Ellworthy is my name.’

‘I am Catalina Gifford,’ repeated the child, ‘and, oh, Uncle James, my mother is your sister. I have come to you because I am in great trouble.’

‘Indeed! you seem to make out the relationship very neatly.’



'I am Catalina Gifford ; please are you Mr Ellworthy ?'

There was not the ghost of a smile, nor the faintest scrap of sympathy on Ellworthy's hard face.

'You have come to me because you are in trouble?' he repeated very slowly, 'and your name is Catalina Gifford; and if your mother is my sister, then you are my niece. Is not that so?'

Catalina nodded; she could not find words to reply.

'Well, have the goodness to state your business.'

For a wild moment the little girl wished that she could be buried under the floor; but once again her thoughts flew back to her father.

'A desperate case means desperate action,' she whispered to herself.

'I am waiting,' said Mr Ellworthy.

'Mother didn't wish me to come,' said Catalina then, 'but we are in trouble, and you are my uncle. Things are very bad at home.'

'The old story. I might have guessed it,' said Ellworthy impatiently. He sank into a chair and pushed up his hair. His action roused Catalina's anger and added to her courage.

'Yes,' said she, 'things are very bad at home just now. We want some one to help us very badly. If no one will do so, then my father, Professor Gifford—Uncle James, he is one of the best men who ever lived—will die.' Here she covered her face with her hands.

'Have you anything further to say?' asked Mr Ellworthy, after a pause.

‘Yes, I have this to say: you are rich, and we are poor, and mother is your very own sister. I have come here, Uncle James, to ask if you will help us.’

‘Any one who tells the simple truth to Ellworthy, and ain’t afeard to stick up to it, why, he ain’t half a bad sort,’ the man in the train had said to Catalina. There was an awful pause when her little voice dropped again into silence. Mr Ellworthy did not utter a single word. After a time he pushed a chair forward.

‘Sit down,’ he said.

Catalina did so.

‘Now,’ he said abruptly, ‘when you can get over your nervousness, perhaps you will tell me something more.’

‘I am not nervous, Uncle James.’

‘Nor frightened, eh?’

‘Not now.’

‘Plucky,’ murmured Mr Ellworthy under his breath.

Aloud he said: ‘How old are you, Catalina?’

‘Fifteen.’

‘Can you assure me, on your word of honour, that your mother has not sent you to me?’

‘She has not. It is my own idea; I first thought of it; I acted on it. No one wanted me to come.’

‘Does your mother know that you are here?’

‘Yes, she had to give me money for my fare; she

was troubled at my coming. I came to you because there was no one else to go to.'

'Did she tell you what sort of a man I was?'

Catalina hung her head.

'Mother seemed to think it was hopeless my coming to you,' she said, after a pause.

'Ah, she thought that, did she. I wonder, after hearing her opinion, you had courage to do what you have done.'

'I was desperate,' said Catalina.

'You have appealed to me, then, as a last resource?'

'Yes, sir, quite as a last resource.'

Catalina looked full up now into the dark, stern face. Suddenly an expression passed over it which caused her heart to beat; she saw something like a twinkle in the eyes; the mouth, however, was still firm as a line. Mr Ellworthy gave her a full, keen glance, then he went to a speaking-tube in the wall, and removed the stopper. He called down some words through the tube which Catalina could not hear; a voice replied, and a moment later, the gray-haired, respectable-looking clerk entered the room.

'Oliver,' said Mr Ellworthy, 'I want you to fetch a cab.'

'Yes, sir,' said the man.

'And when you have fetched it, put this young lady in, and go with her immediately to my house in Donville Square. See Mrs Ellworthy, and tell her

that I have sent Miss Gifford to her care, and that Miss Gifford is my niece. You will stay with us to-night, little Catalina Gifford,' said Mr Ellworthy. 'I will talk to you at my own house. I have no more time to give you just now.'

'But mother expects me home to-day.'

'That is impossible, unless indeed you wish to have nothing further to say to me. Give me your mother's address, and I will send her a telegram, and tell her that you are staying with us for the night.—Now, go at once, Oliver.—Good-morning, Catalina; I shall see you by-and-by.'

The next moment, Catalina found herself outside the oak door, and the elderly clerk was looking down at her with smiling and kindly eyes.

'Well, miss, you are a plucky little lady,' he said; 'I don't doubt but you have won your way whatever it may happen to be. Now, come straight downstairs with me.'

'Do you think my uncle is very angry?' asked Catalina.

'Angry?' said the man; 'angry when he asks you to stay at his house? That ain't his way of showing anger. Just wait here a minute, miss'—he opened the door of the small room into which he had shown Catalina before—'I'll have a hansom here in a twinkling.'

The clerk bustled away, and soon afterwards Catalina found herself driving quickly through the crowded

Manchester streets in Mr Oliver's company. He was very kind to her, and she did not feel at all afraid of him ; her heart also felt unaccountably light. She had got over the worst of her business ; she had really braved the lion in his den. She now felt sufficiently calm to be able to listen to her companion's remarks.

'There, to our right, that's our town-hall,' said Oliver ; 'we are wonderfully proud of it, I can tell you. Look up that street, please, miss ; do you notice how long and straight it is ? It is up there I live. I have a small house, old-fashioned but very comfortable. Mr Ellworthy used to live in my house long ago. Ah, he is wonderful, he has prospered. It is but for him to touch a thing, and it is sure to succeed ; he is like King Midas—every single thing turns to gold under his spell.'

'Is my uncle very rich ?' asked Catalina.

'Rich !' exclaimed the clerk ; 'I believe you. He has thousands upon thousands of pounds put away, and his yearly income, why, it is almost past counting. He is a very good gentleman, too, and knows how to spend his money ; no one can be more liberal than Ellworthy when he likes, but it often takes a powerful touch to make him unbend, for he is close, too, and hard, my word, as hard as a tenpenny nail ; but go at him the right way, and he's as good as good can be. A more upright or more honourable gentleman could not be found in the length and breadth of Manchester, and that is saying a good deal. He gives a power away in

charity, too ; his name heads most of our big charitable lists. Why, he has just built a whole wing to the big hospital ; you can see it there up at the top of the town, just over all those houses. Yes, Ellworthy is a right good man, one of the best in Manchester.'

'I am very glad,' answered Catalina. She had not time to say any more, for the cab drew up suddenly in front of an important-looking house, in the middle of a fine square. A girl of about Catalina's age was standing at one of the lower windows ; she was a red-haired girl, with large blue eyes and a frank, fair, beautiful face. She evidently found the occupants of the cab of immense interest ; her little, eager face all lit up ; she turned quickly, and the next moment was standing in the hall. Oliver went forward at once and began to explain something to her.

'Come in, Miss Gifford,' he said ; 'this is your cousin, Miss Madeline Ellworthy. Is your mother in, Miss Madeline ?' he continued.

'No, Mr Oliver,' replied the child ; 'mother has gone out for the day. Can I do anything ? Who did you say that little girl was ?'

'Your cousin, Miss Catalina Gifford. Mr Ellworthy asked me to bring her here, and he says she is going to stay for the night.'

'Gifford !' cried the little girl ; 'I don't know any one of that name.'

'Miss Catalina Gifford, your cousin,' said Oliver, glancing at Catty as he spoke. 'She has just come

from London, and Mr Ellworthy says will you please make her comfortable. I was to see your mother, and give the message to her, but you will doubtless do just as well.'

'Of course I shall. How surprised I am! How very queer it sounds! my cousin, Catalina Gifford; but, of course, I am very glad, very glad indeed.' The little girl's face seemed to wake up, smiles began to dance all over it; she skipped excitedly up to Catalina and took her hand.

'Good-bye, miss,' said Oliver, glancing at Catty as he spoke.

'Good-bye,' replied Catalina; she ran up to the old clerk, and gave him her hand. 'You have been very kind to me,' she said.

'You'll do now, miss, you'll do fine,' he answered; he nodded to her almost affectionately, and the next moment left the house.

'I am very glad you have come,' repeated Madeline, 'but I have not the faintest idea who you are. Are you a Manchester girl? How can you be my cousin? How did father find out anything about you?'

'I am a London girl,' replied Catalina, 'and I am your cousin; that is, if you are Uncle James Ellworthy's daughter, for my name is Catalina Gifford.'

'My cousin,' repeated Madeline. 'I did not know that I had any young relations. Have I really got cousins? Are there many of you, or are you the only one?'

‘There are a good many of us. I mean there are three besides myself.’

‘I am very glad indeed,’ said Madeline in a slow voice, in which a great deal of rapture was concealed.

‘I have always longed beyond anything to have cousins, but mother was an only child, and I always thought, somehow, that father was, too. It makes things rather dull for me. Oh, of course, I have got friends—lots of them. I go to a big day-school, and most of the girls in my class are very friendly; but a cousin—a real relation—that is a different thing. Are you sure of what you say, Catalina?’

‘Yes, I am quite sure; my mother is your father’s sister; so, of course, I am your cousin.’

‘Dear me, how *very* exciting. Come right upstairs, won’t you? I don’t think I ever heard of anything quite so interesting before. I was going to have such a dull day. Come straight up to my room; I will show you all my things.’

As Madeline spoke, she took Catalina’s hand and squeezed it tightly. The two little girls were about the same height, and although totally different in appearance, Madeline did not take a moment in establishing a very pleasant sort of comradeship between them.

‘Come straight to my bedroom,’ she repeated. ‘You must be tired; you must want to take off your outdoor things, and brush your hair. This is my room.’

She flung open the door of a large, beautifully furnished room, as she spoke.

‘Come in,’ she said. ‘I hope you will like my pretty bedroom; it was freshly furnished and decorated this spring.’

It was certainly a beautiful room, arranged in perfect aesthetic style. All the furniture was of the palest shade of blue, something the colour of a robin’s egg; the walls were papered in a lighter shade of the same tone; the carpet was thick blue felt; the bed-hangings were white, looped up with blue ribbons. Lovely photogravures from celebrated pictures hung on the walls. There was a large glass over-mantel, and another which reflected Catalina’s little figure from head to foot stood between the two windows. The outlook into the somewhat dismal square was gloomy enough, but the room itself was full of brightness and beauty.

‘Oh, what a lovely room!’ cried Catalina with enthusiasm, ‘and what a splendid copy you have of Sir Noel Paton’s “Faith and Reason.”’ She went up to the engraving, and began to examine it eagerly.

‘Yes, is not it a fine picture?’ replied Madeline; ‘mother gave it to me on my last birthday. I am very fond of Art of all kinds. But now, Catalina, don’t waste your time looking at the picture; I have got so much to say to you. You cannot imagine what it is to me to find a relation of my own age. Here, you can use my brush and comb for your hair; what pretty fluffy sort of hair you have, and so dark. Would you not like to wash your hands? Then come

into my dressing-room ; there is hot water laid on there.'

Madeline bustled about ; she fetched clean towels and turned on the hot-water tap. The arrangements in the little dressing-room were as perfect as those in the bedroom. Catalina felt the soothing influence of plenty of money pervading all her tired little frame. Suddenly she felt faint and terribly hungry. Would it occur to her new cousin (she certainly was all that was charming) to offer her a good meal ? Oh, how really starved she felt ; she began to think anxiously of beefsteaks and mutton-chops, and all the other substantial fare which she would dearly like to consume. Madeline, however, who had never known real hunger in the whole course of her pampered little life, had no idea of this. It did not occur to her as possible that any one could be hungry between meals, that any human being, at least in her own class of life, could live who did not lunch at the appointed hour. To be hungry, very hungry, between lunch time and tea time had never occurred in the most remote degree to her imagination.

'When you have washed your hands and tidied your hair, we will come downstairs,' she said. 'I have got a dear little sitting-room, half-schoolroom half-boudoir, of my very own. I keep all my treasures there. I shall love to show them to you.'

'I am quite ready now,' answered Catty.

'But how pale you look,' said Madeline, scrutinising

her up and down. ‘I never saw any one exactly like you before. You have got such a clear skin, and yet it is so dark ; how very black and big your eyes are, too ; and your eyebrows, how they arch, and how dark they are ; and then that dusky hair, how thickly it grows round your temples—I do like those little curls and rings and tendrils. Oh Catalina, I feel quite inclined to fall in love with you. Are you really my very own cousin ?’

‘Certainly I am,’ answered Catalina.

‘Then, I suppose we may kiss each other. I *am* falling in love with you, Catalina. I like to love you.’

‘And I like to love you,’ said Catalina suddenly. She was not demonstrative as a rule. Now she put her arms round her cousin’s neck ; they kissed each other quite solemnly. It seemed to Catalina as though they were making a compact.

‘That is right,’ said Madeline ; she laughed joyfully. ‘I was never so glad before, in the whole course of my life. Come right downstairs with me.’

‘I wonder, cousin’—— began Catalina.

‘Yes, cousin,’ answered Madeline. ‘Oh Catalina, how sweet it is to call you cousin, how delicious, how unexpected ! What a nice foreign sort of name you have got ; how did you come by it and by your dark, beautiful face ?’

‘But, cousin,’ said Catalina again.

‘Yes, dear, darling cousin, what is it you want to ask me ?’

‘May I have something to eat? I am awfully hungry.’

‘You are, are you? Oh that is too good. What would you like? Chocolates—I have got some beauties in this cupboard, a whole bottleful—or, pastry of any sort?’

‘Oh, please, a plate of cold beef, or something else quite big and solid. I left London very early this morning, and I have had nothing substantial to eat since—since six o’clock’.

Madeline opened her pretty blue eyes very wide now. For the first time in the whole of her experience she was conscious of a new sensation. She saw that pretty as Catalina was, her dress was made of a coarser material than anything she, Madeline, had ever worn, also that her boots were a little too thick for perfect beauty, and that the lace round the neck of her frock was of a cheap quality. Could it be possible that, in addition to having found an unexpected cousin, that cousin was also poor? Then, indeed, Madeline’s cup of bliss would be full, for if there was one person she had always longed for more than another in the whole course of her little life, it was to have a very poor cousin on whom to confer favours. Madeline was a little lady every inch of her, and she could not possibly do or say anything offensive. She, therefore, looked hastily away from Catty’s poor frock, linked her cousin’s hand lovingly through her arm, and rushed downstairs with her to

the dining-room. Here she rang the bell and gave imperious orders to the footman. The result of this was that, in an incredibly short space of time, Catalina was satisfying her ravenous appetite with cold chicken and ham, with aspic jelly and other dainties.

The meal was finished at last, and the two girls went up to Madeline's pretty sitting-room. Here the dominant colour was a pale shade of rose, the blinds were rose-coloured silk, the curtains Liberty silk of the same shade and texture. Madeline threw herself back in a very snug chair, invited Catalina to make herself quite at home, and then began eagerly to question her.

'Now I am full of curiosity,' she said, 'and you really must gratify me. What put it into your head to come to us?'

Catalina looked at her very soberly; she did not reply at all for a minute, then she said:

'I think I would rather not tell you, Madeline.'

'But why not? I think that is unkind of you. Do you know that you whet my curiosity almost beyond bounds? Please, do tell me. Well, if you won't, at least let me know how it is that you have grown to your present age and I have grown to mine, and yet we have never heard of each other until to-day? Please, do tell me the reason.'

'Won't you ask your father when he comes back, Madeline?'

‘How tiresome you are. Oh no, you are not; you are perfectly sweet. But do let me go on questioning; perhaps you will be able to answer one or two of my inquiries. You really and truly, Catalina Gifford, live just four hours by rail from here?’

‘Yes, Madeline.’

‘And yet I have never, never in the whole course of my existence, heard your name.’

‘That is not my fault,’ answered Catalina.

‘Did you hear my name before to-day?’

‘No.’

‘Well, it is the queerest, most interesting, remarkable thing I ever heard of in my life. You might just as well have come all the way from New Zealand. Why, I go to London two or three times a year. You and I have been close together; we have been almost breathing the same air. Well, dear little cousin, I am truly glad that you exist. I am truly glad that you have come to see me at last. Do you mind very much if I kiss you over again?’

‘It is delightful to kiss you,’ answered Catalina.

‘I shall love you as long as I live,’ answered Madeline. ‘I hope I shall know the other cousins soon, and my aunt, my father’s sister; but I wish to say now that I shall never love any of them as I love you, for you are the first young relation who has ever come into my life. Of course I have got father and mother, and there is Uncle Jonathan and Aunt Tabitha; but Uncle Jonathan is an old bachelor,

and Aunt Tabby is an old maid, and nothing young of my very own has ever come near me. You are all my own, Catty. Catty, do promise that you will never love any cousin as you love me.'

'I love you already, cousin Madeline; you are delightful, you are very kind to me.'

'Now, won't you tell me how you came? You didn't drop from the clouds, you know.'

'I got into the train this morning; the train brought me to Manchester.'

'You got into the train at London?'

'Why, of course.'

'And what did you do when you got to Manchester?'

'I took a hansom and drove to your father's office.'

'Well now, that was very plucky, I might almost say it was a foolhardy thing to do, for father hates any of his relations coming to his office. Mother would almost rather die than disturb him at the great firm of Ellworthy & Co., and yet you, the little unknown cousin, absolutely went there?'

'Yes.'

'Wasn't he very much surprised, very angry?'

'I am sure he was surprised, Madeline; but he didn't say that he was angry.'

'What did he say? Do, do, do tell me.'

'He looked me up and down and asked one or two questions, then he offered me a chair, and I told him what I had come for.'

‘Ah, now, that is the point of points. What did you come for?’

‘Madeline, I told your father. I think perhaps I had better not say any more.’

‘I see,’ answered Madeline, ‘you won’t be drawn; well, I will get it out of father. But, pray, go on now; tell me the rest of the interview. After father had offered you a chair, what happened next?’

‘He rang a bell and asked his clerk, Mr Oliver, to take me here. I heard him tell Mr Oliver that he was to explain all about me to your mother. He said I was to spend a night in this house, Madeline. He promised to send mother a telegram, for she of course expects me home this evening.’

‘She must be a very funny sort of woman to do that. Much chance you have of going home for a long time.’

‘Madeline, I must go back to-morrow. I am wanted very badly at home.’

‘You, darling; how sweetly you say that. Oh Catalina, I love you so! Do let us draw our chairs closer together, I have so much to say to you. I want to tell you all about my past life, and, of course, I want you in your turn to tell me all about yours. It is cosy beyond words to have a cousin of one’s very own. Don’t you like that dear little chair you are sitting in? Father bought it for me last week. There is nothing father would not give me.’

‘He is very rich, I suppose?’ said Catalina.

‘Rich, yes, tiresomely so. We have never known

in all our lives what to do with half the money we possess. It gives mother and me quite a sense of *ennui*. When father asks either of us what we want we are dreadfully puzzled what to tell him. I am sure mother has got every single thing that the heart of woman could desire, and so have I—pets of all kinds, two dear little Shetland ponies and the sweetest little carriage you can imagine. I will drive you out to-morrow morning, and then you'll know something more about it. I can drive my ponies beautifully. Then I have a splendid horse, Apollo I call him; such a beauty; and I am having riding lessons. Of course it goes without saying that I have books, toys, music, friends; but now at long last, the dearest possession of all has come to me—I have a real live cousin. Oh, the happiness of to-day! Catalina, you must come and live with me; you really must.'

'Thank you, Madeline, but I could not do that. I am wanted at home.'

'I am not a bit surprised. I should think any house would want the sort of girl you are; but they must not be greedy at your home, for I am going to share you from this day out. Please, don't frown, Catalina, it spoils your pretty face. We need not discuss that point just at present, need we? But, pray, tell me about your home; what sort of girls are your sisters?'

'They are pretty girls; one I think is a little like you.'

‘Which? This is charming. What is the name of the girl who is like me?’

‘Rose.’

‘A sweet name. Has she got my carroty locks?’

‘Her hair is fair, not red.’

‘I hate red hair. I wish I hadn’t got it. I call my red hair my cross; we all must have some cross, must we not?’

‘Yes, but hair like yours is not a cross, Madeline. Why, it is beautiful; it is like the old pictures. I should like you to take it down some day and fluff it round your face. Oh, I should like some day to paint you with that beautiful red hair round your face.’

‘But most people think it ugly,’ said Madeline.

‘No artist could think it ugly. Why, it is superb; so thick and fine, and such a glorious colour.’

‘Hear, hear!’ cried Madeline. ‘You’ll make me conceited if you go on any longer, dear little coz.’

‘I only tell you the truth,’ answered Catalina.

‘You talk as if you loved Art.’

‘Well, so I do. I hope to be an artist some day.’

‘Do you really. Now begin at once; tell me all about that.’

Madeline nestled a little closer to her companion, and then Catty began to talk. She had been drawn to Madeline before; but in the course of this conversation her whole heart opened out to her; for Madeline also loved Art, and had studied it for some years with

a certain measure of success. She was a member of the excellent and celebrated Art school of Manchester. She now brought out her drawings and sketches, and Catty and she examined them together.

They were in the midst of this fascinating employment when the footman threw open the door and announced that visitors were in the drawing-room—Mrs and Miss Trevelyan and Miss Rhoda Stanford.

‘Rhoda Stanford!’ cried Catalina! She coloured and looked excited.

‘Do you know her?’ asked Madeline.

‘I know a girl of that name. I wonder if it can be the same.’

‘It probably is, for I remember Mina Trevelyan’s cousin is at some School of Art in London. But what a nuisance that they should have arrived just now.—James, why did not you tell them that mother was out?’

‘I did, Miss Madeline; but they asked immediately for you.’

‘Oh dear! Well, I suppose we cannot help ourselves.—Bring tea into the drawing-room at once, James.—Come along, Catty; you will help me to entertain.’

When the girls entered the drawing-room, Mrs Trevelyan, a high-bred, intellectual-looking woman of about forty years of age, came eagerly forward.

‘How do you do, my dear?’ she said, kissing Madeline as she spoke. ‘Mina and I were both anxious to

see you for a moment. We want you to come to tea with us to-morrow night. I did not know that you had a visitor with you, my love.'

'Yes; but I have,' said Madeline. 'And such a delightful visitor, my own cousin; her name is Catalina Gifford; she came from London to-day. I am awfully excited about her.'

'How do you do, dear?' said Mrs Trevelyan. She gave Catty a keen, somewhat inquisitive glance as she spoke. It did not take her an instant to discover that the little girl's frock was shabby, and her boots none of the best; but then her eyes rested on the charming face with pleased admiration. Mina Trevelyan, who stood near, also noticed the shabby dress and the beautiful face, and wished with an impatient sigh that she was half as pretty.

'Dear Catalina, who would have expected to see you here,' said Rhoda's voice at that moment.

'I thought it must be you, Rhoda,' said Catalina, holding out her hand. Rhoda took it with an air of condescension.

'Wonders never cease,' she remarked. 'I had not the slightest idea,' she added, lowering her voice, 'that you were related to my dear friends the Ellworthys.'

'Oh, then you *are* Catalina's Rhoda Stanford,' cried Madeline. 'What an extraordinary and wonderful day. You would like to talk to Rhoda, would you not, Catty?'

Catalina did not reply. Rhoda pulled her down to seat herself near her.

'I have lots to say to you,' she began in an eager voice. 'But first of all, do tell me, are you related to the Ellworthys? If you are, how is it you never mentioned it?'

'Mr Ellworthy is my uncle,' replied Catalina. 'I had no reason to mention the relationship,' she added.

'Oh dear,' replied Rhoda, tossing her head slightly. 'If the Ellworthys were my relations (did you say that Mr Ellworthy is your *uncle*?)—well, if they belonged to me—people so rich and so, so'—she glanced at Madeline as she spoke—'I'd have spoken about it; but you always were different from any one else, Catty.'

Catalina frowned. She could not bear to hear herself called Catty by Rhoda; her dislike to this officious and pretentious-mannered girl increased moment by moment.

Meanwhile Rhoda was, as she expressed it afterwards, taking Catalina's measure. She did not fail to notice the shabby frock and the thickly-made boots. But when she glanced at the beautiful and piquant face the old envious longing stirred in her heart.

'If only I were like her,' she reflected, 'I declare I'd be satisfied to be poor. If I had her face and her talent I could make something of my life.'

Things are unfairly divided. Yes, I hate her for what she has got; but'—— Here a memory came back to Rhoda; she smiled inwardly.

'I am paying her out, and that is a comfort,' she muttered to herself. Aloud she said: 'I am surprised to see you. Of course I have known the Ellworthys for years. The Trevelyanans are my cousins. Mrs Trevelyan is my aunt, and I generally spend a part of my holidays with them. I am leaving to-morrow, however, as I am going to join my own family at Scarborough. Did you *really* say that Mr Ellworthy is your uncle ?'

'Yes, Rhoda. You seem to find it very difficult to believe what I tell you. My mother is Mr Ellworthy's sister.'

'You amaze me. I always did think; but never mind. Now that you are here, I am glad that I have met you. It may make a difference next term; any relations of the Ellworthys are worth cultivating. By the way, when you are talking to Madeline, if you mention my name, don't, I beg of you, give your real opinion with regard to my artistic powers.'

'I am not likely to,' answered Catalina. 'But even if I did, what would it matter ?'

'It would not matter anything; but I am somewhat inclined to pose as an artist when with the Trevelyanans. The mere fact of my belonging to the Randall School impresses them, and I like to impress people whether correctly or otherwise. You will

oblige me, therefore, by not giving your candid opinion of my powers to your cousin.'

'I will say nothing; I will not even mention your name.'

'Thank you—that is kind. Now, don't you think Madeline charming?'

'Yes,' answered Catty. She hated discussing her cousin with Rhoda; but Rhoda would not allow her to escape. She raised her voice on purpose, hoping that the other ladies might hear Catalina's somewhat unwilling answers.

'I am glad you were able to leave home,' she said presently. 'Your father must be much better.'

'He is, thank you.'

'It is true that he was dangerously ill, is it not?'

'Yes; but he is better now.'

'Is he likely to get quite well again?'

'I hope so.'

'Well, he is a wonderful man,' said Rhoda in an impressive voice. 'I have heard a good deal about Professor Gifford from one or two people lately.'

'Professor Gifford,' said Mrs Trevelyan at that moment. She rose from her chair and took another by Catalina's side. 'Professor Gifford,' she repeated. 'Did Madeline say, my dear, that your name was Gifford?'

'Yes,' answered Catty.

'And you live in London?'

‘Yes.’

‘Catty arrived here by the 11.55 train,’ burst from Madeline’s lips. ‘She might just as well have come from the clouds, so astonished was I, and so unexpected was her arrival.’

‘Are you really Professor Gifford’s daughter?’ asked Mrs Trevelyan.

‘Yes,’ answered Catty.

‘Then, my dear child, I am delighted to see you. Once I had the great privilege of hearing Professor Gifford lecture. I shall never forget what he said, nor how he said it.’

Catalina felt the tears rising to her eyes. She lowered her eyelashes; a great wave of love and longing for her father swept over her heart.

‘Did I hear you tell Rhoda that the Professor has been ill?’ continued Mrs Trevelyan.

‘He has been very ill, Mrs Trevelyan.’

‘Overdoing it, of course; those clever men always break down in that sort of fashion. Once, years ago, I heard him lecture; his subject was the dawn of art in ancient Greece. I remember how he looked and what he said. That old, forgotten subject seemed to live and palpitate with the life of our own century when he lectured on it. You are a lucky girl to have such a father.’

‘Indeed, I know that well,’ said Catalina.

‘I am glad you appreciate him, and I am quite sure he appreciates you. It is nice to meet you. I

must see more of you. You must come to-morrow with Madeline, to visit us. Madeline, dear, that could be easily arranged, could it not? I should like to show your cousin some of the treasures I picked up when I was last in Greece. She would tell the Professor all about them. I am quite sure he would be interested in some of my relics.'

'We could go to-morrow, Catty, could we not?' said Madeline.

'I must go home to-morrow,' answered Catalina.

'Oh, that is nonsense. I am not going to allow you to stir.—Yes, Mrs Trevelyan, we will come to-morrow, or at least, mother will send you word in the morning.—Now, Catty, notwithstanding the colour in your cheeks, and the protest on your lips, you are not going to get away from your own cousin just when she has found you.'

'I shall take no excuse,' said Mrs Trevelyan, smiling, and rising as she spoke. 'Now, good-bye, my dear.' She drew Catty towards her as she spoke, and kissed her again.

'I am proud to know your father's daughter,' she said.

As soon as ever the ladies went, Madeline rushed up to Catalina, and threw her arms round her neck.

'I have not only found a cousin,' she cried, 'but in her own way she is a sort of celebrity. I mean, of course, Catalina, that you are the daughter of one. Oh, how lucky you are, and how I envy you.'

‘Lucky !’ said Catalina ; ‘if only you knew, Madeline.’

‘Well, of course you are lucky. Is not your father a great man ?’

‘Yes,’ said Catalina, ‘yes ;’ but she sighed as she spoke. Yes, she knew that her dear father was really great ; but if Madeline could see him now. If Madeline knew on what a feeble thread his life hung. If Madeline, who lived in a palace of gold, could really look into that poor home, and see the want, and the struggle, the awful trials which come to grinding poverty.

‘If there’s one thing I envy more than another,’ continued Madeline, skipping up to the open window, and looking out as she spoke, ‘it is those girls whose fathers have distinguished themselves. Of course I am proud of my own dear, rich old dad. I love him, for he is one of the best men in the world ; but I do just long that he should be celebrated in any other way than just being so tiresomely, so unromantically rich. Catty, I envy you.’

CHAPTER XII.

THE DINNER DRESS.



THE head of the great firm of Ellworthy & Co., Calico Printers, generally left his office about six o'clock in the evening. In summer he returned home in an open landau, in winter in a carefully-closed and padded brougham. His arrival, therefore, at Donville Square generally took place a few minutes after six.

Catalina in the excitement of the afternoon had almost forgotten Mr Ellworthy; but, as the time for his return drew near, Madeline glanced often at the clock.

‘I am so happy,’ she cried; ‘but even so, I cannot keep my curiosity under. Won’t I pounce on dad when he comes in. Hark! what is that? Yes, a carriage has stopped at the door; it is father. Excuse me, Catty, I must rush to meet him. Yes, I hear his voice. I’ll be back in a moment.’

Madeline flew from the room. She ran downstairs.

‘There you are,’ she cried, in her clear, high, childish voice. ‘I am delighted to see you back.’

‘Ha! little woman, and how are you?’ called Mr Ellworthy back to her.

‘Quite well, splendid. Oh, I say, what a delicious time you have given me. Thank you so much, father, for sending me my cousin. I had not the faintest idea that I possessed a cousin in the world.’

‘Hush, child, that will do for the present,’ said Mr Ellworthy. A frown came between his thick eyebrows. He pulled Madeline out of the hall into his own private sitting-room. A footman, who had come up to receive his master’s coat and hat, disappeared down one of the passages.

‘Why did you say “hush,” father?’ asked Madeline.

‘Because we do not want to talk of family matters before the servants.’

‘Of course not; how stupid of me to have forgotten. Well, do shut the door and let me ask all my questions.’

‘I cannot, little puss; I am late.’

‘But you must; I insist: you are not really a bit late. Why, mother has not returned home yet.’

‘Is not your mother at home? Who took care of that little girl?’

‘Why, I, of course. Oh father, she is such a dear, quite the prettiest, most charming girl in the world, and my first cousin too. Of course I took naturally to her, and she took naturally to me, and even already we

love each other dearly; we have sworn to be friends all our lives.'

'I daresay,' interrupted Mr Ellworthy. 'Now listen to me, Madeline: you know nothing whatever about this child. How do you know that I wish you to be friends?'

'How do I know, father?' Madeline backed a step or two away from her parent. 'You must be joking,' she said presently, with a laugh, which had, however, a note of fright in it; 'you cannot wish to prevent me loving my cousin. Father, do say that you are joking.'

'I don't want to hurt you in any way, my little girl,' said Ellworthy—he put his arms round Madeline and kissed her—'but the fact is this, we Manchester folk don't open our hearts quickly. I don't wish you, Madeline, to rush into hasty friendships with anybody, whether cousin or not. You never heard of this girl until a few hours ago.'

'No, and that is the shame of it.'

'The shame of it! Madeline, you forget yourself.'

'I am sorry, father, but I must speak out. I ought to have heard of her.'

'We will say no more now,' said Mr Ellworthy; 'I must talk this matter over with your mother. As she has come, Catalina Gifford must of course stay the night.'

'Oh, she must stay a great deal longer than that; I want her for quite a good visit. Dear father, do come

up to my boudoir, and have a look at her. You don't know what a dear girl she really is.'

'At anyrate she is a plucky one,' said Mr Ellworthy. 'Yes, I will come up and see her, if you like. And so your mother is not at home ?'

'No, she went on a very long round of visits ; she said she would not be back until dinner-time.'

'I wish she had come before,' muttered Mr Ellworthy. 'Had I known, I would not have sent'— His voice dropped, but Madeline heard the lowered words. A fear quite foreign to her, something she had never experienced before, crept into her heart. What could her father mean ; what was the strange mystery which prevented her ever having heard of Catalina until to-day, and which made her father unwilling to encourage her friendship for her cousin ?

The calico merchant and his daughter entered the charming boudoir, side by side.

'Here's father,' said Madeline ; 'I have been telling him, Catalina, what a delicious day you and I have had.'

'Yes, you have been very kind to me,' said Catalina. She stood up, and came a step or two forward. Mr Ellworthy went up to her, and held out his hand.

'Well, my dear,' he said, 'so you are here ! Now I am going to say something quite frank. I did not expect to see you in my house. I doubt if I ever anticipated that—pleasure. This morning I did not even know of

your existence ; but you are my niece, and you have plenty of pluck. I admire pluck, in old and young alike. We won't talk business to-night ; but welcome, my dear, welcome to Donville Square.'

'Thank you,' answered Catalina. She said the words in a low voice ; her heart sank. Cordial as Mr Ellworthy meant to be, there was a look about his mouth and an expression in his eyes which did not augur well for Catalina's mission.

'Did you remember to telegraph to mother,' she asked presently, speaking with a timidity rather foreign to her nature.

'Yes, I sent her a wire ; I said I was keeping you for the night.'

'Oh, there's mother at last,' broke in Madeline, with a sort of shout. 'I'll bring mother to you in one second Catty.'

She rushed out of the room, returning almost immediately with a tall lady, whose hair was of the same brilliant hue as her little daughter's ; her eyes had also the same kindly gleam in their blue depths. Madeline had evidently found time to make one or two hasty explanations, for Mrs Ellworthy came straight up to Catalina, drew her to her side and kissed her affectionately.

'Welcome, dear,' she said. 'I have just learned from Madeline that you have given her a happy day ; thank you for that.—Maddie, love, have you given directions with regard to Catalina's bedroom ?'

‘I have not, mother; how very stupid of me,’ said Madeline, reddening with vexation.

‘Well, never mind, there is plenty of time; she can sleep in the pink room next to yours. I will give directions myself, as I go upstairs. Sit down here by me, Catalina, and tell me about your journey. Madeline says that you left London this morning.’

Catalina began to talk; she found that she could not be afraid of Mrs Ellworthy. Mr Ellworthy walked to a distant part of the room; he flung himself into an easy-chair, and took up one of Madeline’s childish books. He tried to amuse himself turning over the pages; but in spite of all his efforts he could not help hearing some of Catalina’s words.

‘Yes, Mrs Ellworthy, father has been very ill indeed.’

‘Not really in danger, my dear?’

‘Oh yes, he has been at death’s door.’

Mrs Ellworthy questioned on, and Catalina replied.

‘What did you say you want to be yourself?’ said the good lady, raising her voice by-and-by.

‘An artist.’

‘Really? You are fond of art?’

‘I love it better than anything else in the world, except’—

‘Except what?’

‘Father. I—I am very anxious to earn money as quickly as possible.’

There was a force in Catalina’s slightest word, a

directness which showed that she had already found her life's mission. This tone of quiet strength commended itself almost against his will to Mr Ellworthy ; he suddenly flung down the book he was pretending to read, and walked out of the room. Just before he closed the door after him, Catalina's clear, low voice was heard distinctly again :

‘Perhaps mother looks rather old for her age ; she has had a great deal to try her. We are very poor, you know.’

Ellworthy went downstairs, took up his hat and went out. When he had last seen his sister, she was a buxom, rosy-faced, bonny-looking girl. Her eyes had been blue as Madeline's were now ; her laughter had also been as light. Mrs Gifford had been very pretty, when she was only gay, jubilant Rose Ellworthy ; in those days, James Ellworthy had been proud of his only sister. That laughing, dimpled, charming face had often visited him in his dreams ; but seldom, for many a long year, in his waking moments. In the hurry and toil of hastening to be rich he had forgotten all about his sister and the glum-looking, somewhat musty Professor whom she had chosen to marry. Whenever he did think of her it was only with a growl at her folly.

‘She made her bed, and she must lie on it,’ was a very favourite saying of his, whenever he spoke of the only sister who had been his playmate long ago. As the years went on he gave her fewer and fewer

thoughts ; he knew nothing of her trouble, nor of her present life. Rose had thrown over the man whom Ellworthy wanted her to marry ; she had married Professor Gifford against his sanction, the brother and sister had agreed never to meet, never to speak to each other again ; and Ellworthy found it not at all difficult to keep to his side of the bargain. Catalina's arrival, therefore, had brought back the past in a very unpleasant, although effective manner.

The rich merchant took a long walk, trying hard to forget some things which were not altogether agreeable. By-and-by he had to return home, for the dinner hour was approaching ; as he entered the house he muttered a solitary sentence of approval as far as Catalina was concerned.

‘The child is not the least like Rose,’ he said to himself ; ‘she has a great deal of go in her, she has twenty times her mother’s pluck. Rose was always a little coward ; sometimes I thought her even afraid of a shadow. Yes, the girl is plucky, and I admire pluck. Now, whom does she take after ? I have but a dim remembrance of Professor Gifford. I know he was tall and thin, more like a dried mummy, in my opinion, than a living man ; the girl has a strange face, quite foreign, and yes, plenty of pluck, and Madeline, little witch, has had the bad taste, no, the good taste I must admit, to fall in love with her.’ Mr Ellworthy sighed : a soft look came into his eyes as he thought of Madeline ; she was the idol of his heart, his one great living trea-

sure. Had all his gold been put into one side of the scale, and Madeline in the other, he knew which would weigh the heaviest.

Meanwhile, Madeline, quite restored to her usual happiness by her mother's reception of Catalina, hurried her cousin up to her room, to dress for dinner.

'We are exactly one height,' said Madeline, 'so you can wear one of my dresses.'

'No,' replied Catalina, 'I shall really do very well as I am.'

'But you won't, Catty; we always dress for dinner here; you would really look quite remarkable in that thick, coarse—oh, I mean that hot frock. Now, I have more dresses than I know what to do with, and quite half of them are white. You won't be too proud, Catty, to wear one of your own cousin's pretty dresses to-night?'

Catalina would certainly have preferred not to do so, but Madeline overruled her.

'I'll call Cushion in, and she shall dress you,' she said.

'Who is Cushion?' asked Catalina.

'She is my maid, such a dear old thing. I have had her since I was quite a little child.'

'But I would much rather dress myself; that is, if I must.'

'Well, just as you wish; but your room is not ready yet, so you must dress here with me. What fun it will be! Cushion shall help us both.'

A knock came at the door at this moment; Madeline called out 'Come in,' and a kind-faced, middle-aged woman entered the room.

'This is my cousin, Cushion,' said Madeline; 'she came from London unexpectedly, and has brought no luggage with her. I have got to lend her all she wants. Fortunately she is exactly my age, and I expect my things will fit her beautifully. Will you dress us both very nicely for dinner, Cushion?'

'Of course, Miss Madeline. What dresses shall I get out?'

'Those two white chiffon frocks; they are almost exactly alike. What splendid fun it will be if we are both in white; the contrast in our appearance will be quite striking—I the fair one and Catalina the dark one. We won't have any colour at all. Please get out the silk stockings, and the box of white shoes. Now then, hurry, Cushion; I had no idea it was so late.'

Madeline flung open doors, and pulled open drawers, and Catalina, in spite of herself, could not help laughing and enjoying the fun; the lovely wild rose colour stole into her cheeks, and her eyes looked bigger, softer, brighter than ever.

'Was there ever such a darling,' murmured Madeline, as she looked at her cousin's sweet face. 'How happy I am to have found her. I never really knew what great, perfect happiness was until to-night.'

As for Catalina, she felt very much as if she were

part of a fairy story. For the time being she was quite carried out of herself. Here were all the elements of a real romance: the severe and somewhat dreaded uncle; the charming aunt; the lovely, gracious, affectionate little cousin; the house with its wealth and its beauty, its refinement and charm; and now, finally, the fascinating thought that she herself was to be converted into a fairy princess, equal in dress, equal in appearance to her beautiful little cousin. She laughed aloud, and said in a gay voice:

‘At first I did not like the idea of wearing your clothes, but now I am glad; it will be great fun for us both to be alike for once.’

‘For once!’ said Madeline. ‘We shall often be alike—in our dress, I mean. Oh, do be quick, Cushion; there’s a darling.’

Cushion, who exactly resembled her name, not having a hard spot anywhere about her, began to bustle about, and presently the two girls, in their graceful evening dress, stood before her as like, as Madeline expressed it, as two peas. Catty found herself surrounded by soft, flowing draperies which seemed to resemble clouds; her small waist was encircled with a broad soft satin sash; her hair was brushed out until every tendril, every curl, took exactly the most charming position. Madeline drew her quickly up to survey herself in the mirror which stood between the two windows. Catalina gave a quick glance at the neatly shod foot, at the pretty, dainty

figure, at the laughing eyes, the peach-blossom face. She turned away, exclaiming with a laugh :

‘ Oh Madeline, surely this is not you, cousin.’

‘ Yes, it is ; yes, it is,’ answered Madeline. ‘ Oh Catty, if you don’t bowl father over now, I don’t know who ever will. There’s the first bell ; let us hurry down.’

Two or three friends were dining with the Ellworthys, and the girls sat side by side at one end of the long table. Madeline noticed that each person present glanced many times at Catalina, and once she was charmed to overhear a gentleman, whom Mr Ellworthy thought a great deal of, asking him who that lovely, foreign-looking little girl was.

‘ She happens to be my niece ; her name is Gifford. Her father is a very learned man, thought no end of up in town,’ said the merchant, somewhat pompously.

‘ You don’t mean to tell me that she is the daughter of the well-known Professor Gifford ? ’

‘ I believe so ; he is one of the professors of ancient languages at the Burlington Museum.’

‘ Then, of course, he is the same. You must introduce me to that beautiful child after dinner.’

The rest of the evening passed quickly. Catalina was introduced to the gentleman who knew her father’s name, and enjoyed her conversation with him very much. As the evening advanced, Mr Ellworthy found it difficult to keep his eyes away from her ; he was puzzled, distressed, moved ; one minute angry with himself for being so, the next full of schemes to

help Catty and her family. As to the little girl herself, she went to bed, tired out, to sleep soundly. In her sleep she dreamed dreams. Had she really won the fortress? Was the lion tamed? Was the victory hers? Had she taken the heart of her obdurate old uncle?

CHAPTER XIII.

TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS.



BREAKFAST was always at an early hour at Donville Square. Catalina was still sound asleep when Cushion bent over her to awaken her.

‘It is past seven, miss,’ she said, ‘and we have breakfast to the minute at eight. I have just put your bath ready; and would you like me to help you to dress?’

‘No, thank you, Cushion,’ answered Catty, springing out of bed, and the colour coming into her face, ‘I am always accustomed to dressing myself; but I am very much obliged to you.’

‘My dear, I should be real pleased to do anything for you,’ said the old woman. ‘I used to know your mother, Miss Gifford, when she was young, younger than you are now. Eh, but she was a bonny young lady, but not in your style, miss; she took more after Miss Madeline. I am glad to see you in this house, Miss Gifford, and I do hope with all my heart that it is only the beginning of good times,’

Cushion hurried away, and Catalina hastened to finish her toilet. She had no time now to think of being nervous; she was aware that the moment for which she had really come to Manchester was close at hand. She must insist on an interview with her uncle. If he intended to go away to his office without speaking to her, the mission which had cost her mother so dear, which had wasted some of their last few precious shillings, would come to nought.

‘Yes, I must do it, however hard it is,’ thought the little girl. ‘I must beg of him to grant me the favour of a few minutes of his time. I wonder if I can have courage. If I can?’ thought Catalina, suddenly pausing and clenching one of her hands—‘I wonder that I speak even to myself in this fashion. I *must* have courage. Father has to be thought of; there is no question of “can” in the matter.’

Breakfast at the house in Donville Square was not only an early, it was also a hurried meal. Mr Ellworthy was an extremely hard-working man. Not a single particular with regard to his vast business would he ever allow to slip out of his own hands. He had many clerks to work under him in various departments, but he himself held every thread. The morning, therefore, was the worst hour of the day to approach him on any matter outside his own affairs. It was his custom to take the foot of the table at breakfast, with the *Manchester Courier* folded neatly in front of his plate. While he bolted his food he

devoured the newspaper; and neither Mrs Ellworthy nor Madeline ever troubled him with questions at this important hour.

When Catalina and Madeline ran downstairs this morning, Mr Ellworthy glanced up from his paper and gave the children a careless nod.

'You are a little late, girls,' said Mrs Ellworthy. 'Sit near me, Catalina. I hope you had a good night and are not tired.'

'I had a splendid night,' answered Catalina, 'and I feel as fresh as possible this morning.' She looked at her uncle as she spoke. 'Good-morning, Uncle James,' she said.

'Good-morning, my dear,' he replied. He glanced up at his wife with a slight show of impatience. 'There's bad news from the East,' he said; 'we are probably in for a fresh war.'

'Oh dear, how dreadful,' sighed Mrs Ellworthy. Catalina felt desperate; something worse than war would take place in her home if she could not engage her uncle's attention.

'Please, Uncle James, I am dreadfully sorry to disturb you,' she began.

'Very well, Catalina, then don't disturb me,' he replied. 'Mary, will you give this little girl something to eat.'

'Here is your place, Catalina,' said Mrs Ellworthy, a vexed tone in her voice.

But Catalina, who had gone down the room to

that part of the table where Mr Ellworthy was sitting, held her ground.

'It is now or never,' she said to herself.

'I am very sorry, Uncle James,' she began again, 'but I *must* speak to you before you go to your office this morning.'

'Quite impossible,' was the reply. 'I am off in five minutes. Madeline, ring the bell. I have no time to talk to you at present, Catalina.'

But Catalina did not stir.

'I shall have to go back to London before you return,' she continued. 'I came out this long way to see you on very important business. Will you not give me just three minutes of your time?'

To this passionate appeal, for the child's voice had assumed a deep note of tragedy, Mr Ellworthy made no reply whatever; he pushed his empty cup towards his wife with a silent request for more coffee, and the little girl was forced to sit down by her cousin's side.

Madeline bent forward to whisper to her.

'Never mind,' she said, 'we never worry father at this hour; he will see you when he comes back to-night.'

'But I must go home to-day, whatever happens,' answered Catalina.

'Oh, come, come, my dear, that is not to be thought of for a moment,' said Mrs Ellworthy. 'Madeline and I have been making delightful plans. We intend to

telegraph to your mother to ask her to pack up some of your clothes, and to send them here by the next train. You must stay for at least a week; you have done Madeline no end of good already.'

'An excellent plan, Mary,' said Mr Ellworthy, speaking for the first time. He flung down his paper and rose to his feet. 'I am a busy man, Catalina,' he said. 'I by no means eat the bread of idleness. Little girls and their little affairs cannot be attended to at this hour in the morning. Pray accept my wife's invitation, and I daresay I may have time to listen to you some evening, say Sunday evening. I have always leisure on Sunday. You will stay with us for a week, and I can have a chat with you for as long as you like on Sunday.'

'I know you mean it kindly,' said Catalina. 'Oh yes, I know you do; but I cannot stay.' In a moment she had lost her fear. She sprang from her seat and approached her uncle with her black eyes flashing.

'You talk, Uncle James,' she said, 'of your affairs being very important, and I know of course they are; but you don't think at all about me. You fancy because I am only a little girl that I have come here all the way from London by myself to *force myself* upon you, to push my way into your house, just to speak on a little matter. You are mistaken; it is not a little matter. It means life or death. Oh, if you will not listen to me this morning, I don't know what I *shall* do!'

Here she burst into a flood of tears ; her heart was shaken to its very depths. The terrible fear that all was lost swept over her. Her extraordinary and unexpected speech made a profound sensation in the room. Neither Mrs Ellworthy nor Madeline uttered a word ; but Mr Ellworthy gave vent to an impatient sigh.

‘ You are a queer child,’ he said. ‘ Come with me into my study. As you ask for three minutes you shall have them.’

He took Catalina’s hand as he spoke, and led her quickly from the room. A moment later she found herself facing him in a large, luxuriously furnished study at the opposite side of the hall.

‘ Now, child, speak, and be quick about it,’ he said.

‘ I want you to help us, Uncle James,’ said Catalina. ‘ We are in dreadful trouble at home. Father has broken down from hard work ; he has been very ill, at death’s door. He is better now, and if he has fair play, and just a little, a very little of the money which you all think so little of’ —

‘ Indeed you are much mistaken, miss ; think little of money ! That I don’t,’ said Mr Ellworthy.

‘ Well, perhaps you don’t. Perhaps you do know how to spend it. Oh, I must hurry and tell you everything ; you can but refuse me. Father has been ordered a year’s rest, and he is to leave town immediately. Mother has not got money enough to take him

away, and she is also in debt. If no one will help us we shall all be ruined, and father will die.'

'So that is it, is it?' said Mr Ellworthy. 'I might have guessed as much.'

'Yes, that is it. Are you going to help us?'

'You are an extraordinary child. How dare you ask me that sort of question?'

'Because it is the only question I can ask you. We have no one else to apply to, and you are mother's own brother. Mother did not want me to come, but I thought I would, for it is the very, *very* last chance.'

'And you did this entirely of your own accord?'

'Entirely. They none of them wished me to come.'

'Dear, dear—h'm. Queer child, very,' muttered Mr Ellworthy under his breath. 'Can't get rid of her, try as I will. She has got force and character—pluck, heaps of it.' He walked to the window and looked impatiently out. His carriage with his prancing horses was waiting for him. The horses pawed the ground with impatience equal to their master's. He turned his back to the window and came back again to Catalina.

'There, child,' he said, 'I see you won't be put off. I have got to listen to you, and I can't hear your story all in a minute.' He went to the bell and rang it.

When the servant appeared, an extraordinary message was given :

'Tell Parkins to drive three times round the Square,

and then to come back,' said the master of the house.
' Give the message, and shut the door after you.'

The man withdrew in amazement. No one in the whole of the Ellworthy household had ever seen the calico merchant late for his appointments before.

' Now, Catalina, tell me all your story as quickly as possible,' said her uncle, sitting down in an arm-chair, and motioning to her to seat herself on a neighbouring sofa. ' What ailed your father when he was so ill ? '

' The doctor called it an attack of apoplexy.'

' Apoplexy. That's the sort of thing that people don't get over.'

' Well, father has. He is nearly well again.'

' But he is not quite well ? '

' No, not quite. He wants change and rest.'

' How long is it since he had this attack ? '

' A couple of months ago.'

' Apoplexy scarcely ever leaves a man the same as he was before. It is about the grimdest foe that attacks us middle-aged folk. Well, child, and there's no money to give him this necessary rest ? '

' No. He earns a thousand a year in his profession ; but he must pay some one to take his place ; and mother was never, never a really good manager. And, oh, I don't think she was a bit to blame, for things are expensive ; but she owes money. There's very little money left in the bank.'

' Well, to be sure, that's bad,' said Mr Ellworthy.
' To whom does she owe the money ? '

‘To the tradespeople, Uncle James; and tradespeople are so unpleasant when you never pay them.’

‘Of course they are. How do you think they are to live if they are not paid, monkey?’

There was a twinkle now in Mr Ellworthy’s dark eyes, and the dawning of a smile round his grim mouth. Catalina felt all of a sudden as if a ray of sunshine had entered the room.

‘The day before yesterday,’ she continued, ‘my sister went to the bank to draw some of mother’s money, just enough to give two of the tradespeople a little each and to get me my ticket to come to you. Afterwards there were only fifteen pounds left.’

‘Bless my soul!’

‘And that is all we have got in the world,’ concluded Catalina. She did not feel nervous any longer; she had told her whole story. The matter now rested with her uncle James. She felt somehow that, knowing all, he would not fail her.

‘How much does your mother owe, little girl?’ said the merchant, after a pause.

‘Something between two and three hundred pounds. Oh, I know it’s an awful lot.’

‘Come, it might have been worse,’ said Mr Ellworthy. ‘Give me your hand, child; you are a plucky girl; and if I were lying like your Professor I should think none the worse of Madeline if she did for me

what you have just done. I never despise pluck in any one, and so—and so'—

‘You will help us, uncle. You will be so brave and good. Oh, how I shall love you!’

‘My dear, I must do something for you; you are an extraordinary child; but upon my word I admire you. Stay where you are for a minute; I’ll be back soon.’

The merchant left the room, and returned to the breakfast-room, where his wife and daughter were anxiously waiting for him.

‘That girl is a plucky little piece,’ he said the moment he entered. ‘You can have her for a friend if you like, Madeline; she can never do you any harm, and may do you lots of good. She has told me her reason for making us an unexpected visit. Her news is painful, poor child, but I have made up my mind; in fact, there is nothing whatever for it but for me to look into the matter myself. I shall go to the office now; but if I am quick I may contrive to catch the three o’clock train to London.’

‘To London, James?’ cried Mrs Ellworthy; ‘are you going to see the Giffords?’

‘Fact, Mary, I have promised Catalina to do something, and the only way I can help is by investigating matters for myself.’

‘I am very glad, James. I think you are doing your duty.’

‘I shall take Catalina back with me,’ said Mr

Ellworthy.—‘Now, Madeline, what in the world is the matter with you? I am busy enough, and distracted enough, with all this additional worry, without your poking your little finger into the pie. What is up, puss; what do you want to say?’

‘Nothing much, father,’ said Madeline, in a demure voice, and yet with a great deal of spirit and determination in her blue eyes; ‘I only just want to mention that when you go to town I am going too.’

‘Nothing of the sort. I won’t have it.’

‘Yes, but I am; I am not going to lose sight of my new cousin in such a hurry as all that. You shall take me with you this afternoon.’

‘Nonsense, Madeline; you give me a great deal of extra worry when you talk in that silly way.’

‘Father, it is not nonsense, and you know it. You have often taken me to London, and you shall again to-day. We can stay at the ‘Metropole’ as usual. If you are going to help Catalina, and make her happy again, I mean to be with you when you do it. Now you must say Yes. I don’t care how anxious you are to get away to your work; you don’t stir until you say Yes.’ Madeline flung her arms at this moment round her father’s neck, and held him tight.

‘Well, well, yes; anything you please, my love,’ he replied. ‘What a fuss we are all in this morning! I am sure I can scarcely tell whether I am on my head or my heels. I shall be late for all my appointments. Run back to Catalina, Maddie; tell her, like a good

girl, what we have arranged. If you insist on coming, why, you must; but I wish you would be more reasonable.'

'Oh father, you'll find me such a comfort to you in town.'

'Well, well, was there ever such a spoiled child! I'll call for you both in the brougham at half-past two, so be ready.'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LITTLE VICTOR.



ATALINA much enjoyed her return journey to town. In the first place she travelled first-class, in the next Madeline sat by her side and chatted gaily to her almost the entire way; in the third, Mr Ellworthy, looking big and purposeful and strong and benevolent, faced her. She was not at all afraid of James Ellworthy, calico merchant, now; she looked upon him, in short, as a pillar of strength, as a rock on which to lean. There was scarcely a happier girl anywhere than Catalina during that hot ride to town, for she felt that she had won the victory.

During the journey Mr Ellworthy scarcely spoke a word. He had provided himself with the *Times* and several other papers. He was, to all appearance, absorbed in the contents of his favourite literature, and seldom raised his head; but when he did do so, he gave Catalina one or two keen glances, and something in his eyes so completely satisfied her, that she had some difficulty in refraining from jumping up to kiss him. But as she was sure that he would not like

this, she tried to work off her excitement by talking as hard as she could to Madeline.

At last the travellers reached London, and a few moments later were driving in a cab as fast as possible to the old house in Mervyn Square. Catalina began now to have a queer, dreamlike sort of feeling. She was the deliverer; she had effected her purpose, she had bearded the dragon, and was coming home again a victor. It was all so unlikely, and yet it was all so true. She felt herself, and yet unlike herself.

When the cab at last drew up at the Giffords' house, the little girl came back to everyday life with a start. It was Rose's face at the window which helped her to get back her old feelings.

'It is not a dream,' she said to herself; 'I know now it is as true as possible.' She nodded brightly to Rose, who raised her brows in astonishment, waved her hand to Catty, and then vanished into the room.

'Something wonderful has happened, mother,' said Rose, turning and facing the occupants of the tea-table. 'Catalina has just come back in a cab, and there is an old gentleman with her, rather stout, and a pretty sort of girl, with a lot of red hair. Oh, and Catalina's face is so flushed, and she looks so perfectly happy.'

'My dear,' said Mrs Gifford, pressing her hand to her side, as was her fashion when anything excited her very much, 'it must be your uncle; but an old gentleman and stout? Do, Rose, get out of my way. Let me look for myself.'

Meanwhile, Matilda had opened the hall door, and Mr Ellworthy and the two girls had entered.

‘You want a bit of paint here, eh?’ he said, glancing at Catty as he spoke. There was a certain nervousness in his tone. Catalina clutched his arm.

‘Please, Uncle James, come up to the drawing-room,’ she whispered.

‘I hope to goodness, Catty, now that you have got home, you are not going to be stiff,’ said Madeline, who tripped gaily up the stairs behind her father and cousin. ‘Remember, please, that I want to see everybody and at once. I hate to be told that I am just to come to the drawing-room.’

‘You need not stay here long,’ said Catalina, flinging open the door as she spoke.

‘Oh no, I don’t want to; it does not look at all an inviting sort of room.’

‘Maddie, my dear, don’t be so silly and so rude,’ said her father.

‘No, father, I don’t wish to be rude, but I want just to be at home.—Catalina, how pale you look.’

‘I feel pale; I feel as if something would choke me here,’ said Catty. She pressed her hand to her wildly-beating heart. ‘I’ll be back in a moment, Uncle James. In no time, dear Maddie, you shall see the rest of the family and of the house. Now, I must go and tell mother.’

She rushed downstairs.

Mrs Gifford had not dared to stir from the shabby,

old parlour; she was seated on the sofa, with a frightened look in her eyes.

‘So you have come back,’ she said, ‘and who, *who* has gone upstairs?’

‘Uncle James, mother—he is in the drawing-room, and our cousin Madeline.’

‘My brother James? But Rose saw him; she said he was a stout, old man.’

‘So he is, but he is your brother James all the same. Won’t you go to him at once?’

‘Who in the world is Madeline?’ asked Rose. ‘Is she the girl with the red hair?’

‘Yes, our very own cousin; the dearest and prettiest girl in the world. You don’t know now nice she has been to me. Please, mother, won’t you go upstairs at once? Uncle James has come on purpose to see you.’

‘Well, Catalina, I think you are a witch,’ said Mrs Gifford; ‘so you really went to Manchester and saw my brother, and—and you have brought him back here. Child, what am I to think?’

‘Think the best of all, mother, the very best. Oh do go now; don’t keep him waiting.’

Mrs Gifford left the room.

‘Well I never!’ cried Agnes; ‘you certainly are a witch, Catty. Mother is quite right.’

‘Was the lion very fierce?’ asked Rose.

‘No, no, he was delightful, splendid. I really do believe, Rose and Agnes, that everything is all right. This morning I had courage to tell Uncle James the

simple truth. Oh, I cannot recall all he said, but he was good, more than good. He finally arranged to come back here and to see mother. Maddie would come too; I have said already that she is the dearest girl in the world. Oh, to think that they are both in this house. But, oh, girls, I am so—so tired, and so *dreadfully* hungry. And oh, please, how is father?

‘Well, you are in a state of mind,’ said Rose; ‘you look quite white, and your eyes almost wild.’

‘I am so happy and distracted, and starving, and untidy; but how is father, Rose?’

‘Better, I think.’

‘Then do please be quick with tea, some one. I want Maddie and Uncle James to have some; and, oh, I am so hungry.’

‘Poor Catty, I must not ask you another question,’ said Agnes.

She ran out of the room. Catalina threw herself down on a sofa and tossed off her hat.

‘Well, Catty, you ought to be happy, if you have done all you say you have done,’ said Rose; ‘and to think what you have saved us from. You certainly are a plucky child. Mother has been in a dreadful state since you went away; at times I thought she had almost lost her head. What do you think she did yesterday evening? She went into father’s room and sat down by him, and burst into tears.’

‘She did not frighten him, surely,’ said Catalina, turning pale.

‘I don’t think so; I don’t think anything would frighten a man like father. He asked her why she cried, and then she told him.’

‘What did she say? Were you in the room?’

‘Yes, of course; how could I tell you if I were not? I was standing by the window. When father asked her why she cried, she said it was because there was no money, and the doctor had ordered him from home, and he must not work for a whole year, and he’—

‘What did he say?’ asked Catalina.

‘He was not the least bit put out; I never did know such an unworldly man. He just kissed her ever so tenderly, and told her not to fret, and said that he had not the slightest doubt but that something would be managed. Then she told him about the debts, but he did not even mind them; he said again something would be managed. And when she asked him what, he said he could not quite say, but that he had no doubt a thought would come to him presently. A few minutes afterwards he dropped asleep, and when he awoke again he had evidently forgotten all about mother’s conversation.’

At this moment, and before Catty could make any reply, light steps were heard running down the old stairs, the room door was opened, and a girl’s bright face peeped in.

‘It was dull on the landing,’ said Madeline.

‘On the landing, Maddie?’ cried Catalina.

‘Yes, of course. Where else? Do you think I could stay in the drawing-room when your mother

was crying, and father had her in his arms; and—and—oh, of course I fled from the room. It was so dull, however, that I thought I would find you. Is this another cousin ?'

Madeline came up swiftly. She stood close to Catalina, throwing her arm round her waist as she spoke. Then she held out her hand to Rose.

'Are you another cousin ?' she repeated.

'If your name is Madeline Ellworthy, of course I am your cousin,' replied Rose.

'I am very glad, indeed,' said Madeline. 'I think you are pretty, though you are not a bit like Catty; but I like your face. May I kiss you, cousin ?'

'Of course you may.'

Madeline performed this office with eagerness.

'I am so glad I poked you out, Catty,' she continued. 'It was precious dull on that stupid landing. What a dear, booky sort of room ! I must say I like the whole house awfully. It is not a bit like any other house I have ever seen.'

'It is a very shabby, ugly, poor sort of house,' said Rose stoutly.

'Is it ?' answered Madeline; 'then it is much more interesting to me than if it were a rich sort of house. You don't know how tiresome too much money is; at least, it is to me. Now, please, Catalina, where is Agnes ? And where is your dear little brother, Teddy; and Catty, darling Catty, when may I see the Professor ?'

‘I don’t know. I have not seen him myself, yet,’ answered Catty. ‘Oh, here comes tea at last. I’ll just help myself to a cup, and fly up to father. After I have told him about you, perhaps he will see you, Madeline; but I must tell him first.’

‘All right,’ answered Madeline, who had thrown off her hat and seemed perfectly at home. ‘Rose will stay with me while you are away, Catty. Oh, I am fearfully hungry.—I hope, Rose, you won’t mind my making a very good meal.’

Catalina drank off a cup of tea, snatched a piece of bread and butter from the plate, and then left the room. Her heart was beating high; happiness beamed in her dark eyes. She flung open the door of the Professor’s room, and ran eagerly in.

Mr Gifford was lying, looking exactly the same as she had seen him last, by the open window. He glanced up when Catalina entered.

‘Sit down near me, my dear child,’ he said. ‘I have missed you. I wanted you to go on with that book on evolution.’

‘I have been away, father.’

‘Away? Indeed. Where?’

‘I have been on a quest, dear father.’

‘My love, a quest; that sounds interesting. The quest of the Golden Fleece or the Holy Grail, which?’

‘I think the Holy Grail,’ answered Catalina. She lowered her head, dropped on her knees, and buried her bright, excited face against her father’s shoulder.

He did not speak, but lay looking straight before him, in the utter calm which seemed always to pervade the atmosphere in which he lived. His manner soothed Catalina's over-excitement inexplicably; her heart ceased to beat so wildly. She was soon able to raise her face and look full at her father.

'It satisfies me to be with you again, father,' she said; 'I have missed you more than words can say.'

'You have missed me,' replied the Professor; 'but I have been here, my darling.'

'Yes; but I have not been here.'

'I noticed you were not in the room. Well, now that you have come back, you look happy and pleased. Is the scholarship won, Catalina ?'

'No. But I have got something better.'

'The crown of bay ?'

'Not yet. Something even better. Oh father, I cannot speak of it. I can only just sit close to you and feel'—

'What, child ?'

'Thankful, too thankful for words.'

Catty slipped her hand inside her father's. He clasped it in his, and closed his eyes. The sun was just setting, and some of its last rays came in at the open window. Catalina looked right out into the very heart of the sunset, and saw before her a beautiful picture. She saw her father in the midst of the country. She noticed the colour of health returning to his cheeks; the look of health, energy, keen, fresh



‘You are there, Catty,’ said Mrs Gifford. ‘I have come to say something to your father.’

intellect beaming in his eyes. She saw him doing better work than he had ever done before, and she knew deep down in her heart that she was the happy cause of all this. Just because God had put brave thoughts and the courage of her own convictions into her heart these delightful things had happened. Yes, she certainly was a thankful girl to-night. It was to be doubted if ever in her future life she could know a moment of purer joy than the present one. The door of the room was suddenly opened, and Mrs Gifford came in. Her face was flushed, and her eyes bore traces of recent tears.

‘John,’ she cried; ‘John.’

‘Yes, my love.’

‘You are there, Catty,’ said Mrs Gifford. ‘I have come to say something to your father.’

‘Shall I go away, mother?’

‘No. You have the best right in all the world to stay; but for your courage where should I be now? John, I have wonderful news for you.’

‘I am glad to hear it, wife. You and Catty seem both of you in an extraordinary state of excitement; but as it is happy excitement, it gives me pleasure.’

‘But you really do want to hear my news?’

‘Of course. What is it?’

‘Was there ever such a man,’ cried Mrs Gifford, clasping her hands and speaking even in this moment of joy with a certain irritation. ‘You would rejoice

if a new rendering of the Egyptian hieroglyphics could be found or—or some other musty, useless, dead and gone knowledge were suddenly restored to mankind.'

'Don't, Rose,' said Mr Gifford, with a look of sudden pain. 'You talk in a profane manner.'

'Well, I won't; I ought not to annoy you to-night. John, I am a free woman once again.'

'My dear Rose, a free woman. Were you ever a prisoner?'

'I was tied hand and foot. John, I told you last night that I owed a lot of money.'

'Yes, my dear wife; and the news distressed me. I have been thinking the subject over at intervals. Of course those debts must be paid.'

'You dear, stupid darling,' said Mrs Gifford, now falling on her knees by her husband's side. 'Did it ever occur to you how they were to be met?'

'I confess, my love, I was not able to see a way out of the difficulty.'

'Well, think no more about them, John, for they are all to be paid off to-morrow, and I am free, free as woman ever was. Oh, I am both free and happy, for you are to go to the country; and I am to have sufficient money to enable us to live in comfort until you are strong enough to resume your work again.'

'This seems all very wonderful,' said the Professor, after a pause, 'and extremely like the action of a beneficent fairy. Who is our fairy, Rose?'

‘This little girl, your daughter. She was just the bravest child in the world; and went and bearded the lion in his den.’

‘My dear, how strange and confusing. You use such mixed metaphors—prisoners, chains, lions, dens, to say nothing of my fairy. I confess I cannot follow you. What marvellous feat has Catty accomplished?’

‘You know my rich brother in Manchester?’

‘James Ellworthy. Of course. I am given to understand that he has added gold to gold; the canker of riches! Yes, I remember the name, Rose. He and I were once not very friendly. Rose, in those days you were a very beautiful girl.’

‘Oh, my love, my dear husband,’ said Mrs Gifford. She bent low and kissed the Professor’s emaciated hand. Catalina gave both her parents an earnest look. From her mother’s face a heavy mantle of years, care, and anxiety was suddenly lifted. Her father’s face had never looked more beautiful, more spiritual. He put one of his hands on his wife’s head. She bowed her face then until it rested on his breast.

‘And I have done it,’ thought the little girl. She hurried softly out of the room, and closed the door behind her.

‘Mother must tell him in her own way,’ murmured the child, with an insight and consideration above her years.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WORTH OF GOLD.



HEN a kind-hearted and rich man chooses to interfere in the affairs of a poor family, it is astonishing how very little inconvenience and what a vast amount of pleasure he gives himself. He begins for the first time in his life to discover the real and true value of money. He begins to taste some of the happiness, which is the purest on earth, of being able to do substantial good, of being able to relieve the most intolerable form of distress. It is his happy lot to bring back life and hope to those who are hopeless. This was Mr Ellworthy's delightful task during his brief visit to London. He made all kinds of discoveries during that couple of days, and each discovery seemed to warm his heart more than the last. In the first place, he found out that his love for his sister Rose was not the dead and gone thing he had imagined it to be. All during the years when he had apparently forgotten her, the old love was dormant, not dead. When last he had seen her she was a rosy, fresh,

smooth-faced girl ; she was now old for her years, somewhat inclined to be stout, considerably inclined to be florid—in short, as unromantic-looking a woman as eye could behold. Nevertheless, James Ellworthy saw something of the old light in Rose Gifford's face ; he had but to put a little imagination to the fore to call back the vision of the girl who had been his playmate long ago. When Mrs Gifford cried and talked in the old voice, and said a good deal of the old somewhat purposeless things, he found his love for her getting stronger each moment, and when she at last was induced to reveal the magnitude of her debts, he pooh-poohed them in a delightful, cheerful, and never-may-care sort of manner, and assured her that a cheque on his bankers would cause the inconsiderate tradespeople to sing a very different tune.

Early the following morning James Ellworthy and Professor Gifford met, and then it was amazing how the cloud which had prevented Mr Ellworthy from seeing any virtue in Professor John Gifford completely vanished. He looked at him now from a different stand-point, and began to conceive a sincere respect for the man. That respect was quickly merged into not only pity but liking, also into a sort of pride of possession which was very amusing, and was about the last thing Mr Ellworthy ever contemplated.

During the afternoon of that long and happy day, Madeline induced her father to take a walk with Catalina and herself. During that walk, Mr Ellworthy

drew Catalina on to tell him all she knew about her father. No theme could be more delightful to the little girl—she was determined that Mr Ellworthy's eyes should be effectually opened; and for this purpose carried him straight away to the Burlington Museum.

She was able while there to introduce him to two or three of the professors. A very musty-looking, but a very learned, professor happened to be in the hall where the Persian lectures were generally carried on. When he saw Catalina he came quickly forward and asked her about her father. His tone of respect, of interest, the way he paused, the look which came on his face when Catalina told him that the Professor would not be able to resume his work for a year, were by no means lost on Mr Ellworthy. Catalina introduced her uncle, and Professor Farringdon bowed in that abstracted way which seems to be more or less the prerogative of all professors of the ancient languages. Mr Ellworthy imagined that his name might have carried weight even in London; but it was more than evident that Professor Farringdon had never heard of the great calico merchant, the man to whom everybody bowed down in his native town. He scarcely glanced at him, and instantly resumed his conversation with Catalina about her father.

‘A wonderful man,’ he exclaimed. ‘What a loss he will be even for the interim during which he must remain away from his duties. It will be almost

impossible to fill his place—of course the Professorship will gladly be kept open for a year.'

Presently he shook hands with the party, and said to Catalina that he would be much honoured if her father could see him for a few minutes any day at any hour most convenient.

'That Professor of yours seems a remarkable man, Catalina,' said Mr Ellworthy.

'Of course,' replied Catalina, 'there is no one else like him in the world.' There was not a scrap of vanity in her voice, but there was a good deal of a tender sort of pride. Mr Ellworthy became more and more impressed. In short, before he returned to 52 Mervyn Square he had acquired a vast respect for the Professor, and was proud of being connected with him. Certainly it was his bounden duty to keep such a man going for a year—a man who would be a public loss, who could not by any possible means he replaced, was certainly some one to arouse Mr Ellworthy's respect.

Arrangements were quickly made for the entire family to leave the house in Mervyn Square within the following week. Mr Ellworthy gave his sister carte-blanche to take a nice house in the country, and then made other arrangements which would enable her to finance the establishment in perfect comfort.

'Say nothing, my dear Rose, say nothing,' he continued, as he thrust a cheque for the first quarter's rent, and a good deal over, into his sister's hand.

‘Remember, I am your brother. I have neglected you shamefully, but the only thing the best and the worst of us can do is to turn over a new leaf when we have discovered our faults. That child of yours opened my eyes, and I am vastly obliged to her. The fact is, Rose, my dear, whatever I thought in the old days, I am now very proud of that Professor of yours; I can tell you he’ll be a feather in my cap in Manchester. Of course I am very well known there, and thought no end of—they all worship money in my native town, my dear, and small blame to ’em, for money can do a good bit—but the wife, the best woman living, has had a hankering to get into another sort of society—a sort above and beyond the mere mercantile type. When once I tell her that we are closely connected with Professor Gifford, and let it be known, as I easily can, what sort of man he is, why, my dear sister, the thing is done. So you see, for your comfort, that you give as much as you get. Now, Rose, there’s only one last thing to arrange—what is to become of Catalina?’

‘Catalina,’ said the mother; ‘I suppose she will come to the country with the rest of us.’

‘She will, of course, for a bit; but you don’t want to have the career of a child of that sort ruined. She wishes to become an artist. Now, she cannot learn art in the heart of the country, can she, Rose?’

‘I suppose not.’

‘Well, let me proceed. You know Madeline has taken the most enormous fancy to her.’

‘What a dear little girl your Madeline is, James,’ said his sister.

‘Yes, yes, the best child living—the most unselfish creature.’

‘Any one can see that.’

‘I am heartily glad you admire her, Rose; but now to return to Catty. I have made certain plans for her too. You send her to me; I’ll talk them over with her by herself.’

Mrs Gifford left her brother seated in the ugly, shabby dining-room. When he found himself alone he rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

‘A capital day’s work,’ he muttered. ‘I must conclude matters, however, and quickly too; for if I am to attend to my own affairs, I have got to return to Manchester by the night-train. Yes, it is a fine thing to be rich when all is said and done. I have lifted a burden from poor Rose’s shoulders, and given that gifted man, Professor Gifford, a chance of life. Ha, here you are, Catalina. Now, sit down by me; I am going to ask you a straight question.’

‘What is it, Uncle?’ asked Catty.

‘Take this seat. I have a good deal to say to you.’

‘And I have something to say to you,’ answered Catalina. ‘I have been wondering in what words I could get you to understand’—

‘To understand what, my dear?’

‘What I feel towards you, uncle—to get you to understand what a great, wonderful thing you have done.’

‘ My dear, not another word. I know perfectly well what I have done, and I am too busy to listen to any thanks. Yes, yes, you are a good child, the best I have ever come across. My dear, I know what is in your heart; you need not talk about it. My reward is the comfortable, healthy feeling my conscience has got. I assure you, yes, it is quite singing within me, and that’s an awfully nice feeling. Now, to talk about yourself.’

‘ Yes, uncle.’

‘ You want to go on with your Art, eh ? ’

‘ Of course.’

‘ Now, what do you say, Catalina, to coming to live with Madeline in Manchester ? ’

Catalina’s face went from red to white—her lips quivered; she fixed her dark eyes full on her uncle.

‘ You would like it, eh ? ’ said Uncle James.

‘ No.’

Mr Ellworthy looked disappointed.

‘ Uncle, you have given me credit for having courage, and I must have sufficient courage now. I must tell you the simple truth. I would like it for some things, for I really love Maddie, and of course I love you; but I could not come to live with you. It would not be right, it would not be good for me. I am not meant to be rich, and if I stayed all my time in a great rich house like yours, it would not suit me; it would be foreign to me, Uncle James. Then, for the next few months, I want to be with father, and afterwards—

‘Well, that is what I am coming to. You must go on with your art some time, and how can you do it in the country?’

‘I certainly could not become an artist,’ said Catalina.

‘Well, child, you ought to hear me out. There is a splendid School of Art in Manchester. If you lived with us, and gave your cousin pleasure, and your old uncle—yes, your old uncle too, Catalina—you might study art under Professor Murchison, whose name, I assure you, my dear, is held in very high esteem in the Art world.’

‘I could not do it, Uncle James.’

‘Then, what do you intend to do? You know, child, you have got talent. If you are not rich you may have to earn your living. Is it right for you to hide your talent in a napkin?’

‘No, I will use my talent. If I could only win the scholarship, I might go on studying at the Randall School.’

‘What is there about this Randall School which seems to interest you so much?’

‘It is a splendid place, Uncle James; it is much the best Art School in London.’

‘Well, London is a big place. I should say the best school in London had a fair chance to be the best school in the world. You would rather go on studying at the Randall School, eh?’

‘Much rather.’

‘But how can you manage that, puss, when your father lives in the country. The other side of Surrey is some distance from the Randall School, is it not?’

‘It is.’

‘Come, little girl, tell me exactly what you mean. Have you any chance of this scholarship?’

‘I don’t know that I have much, but I must try for it. Professor Forde has offered a scholarship to the students who belong to the animal school. The girl who gets it has free tuition for three years. If I could only be the lucky girl, I have not the slightest doubt that at the end of three years I might be able to earn enough money for my future fees by selling pictures and little scraps for illustration and that sort of thing.’

‘Now look here, Catty; I commission the first three pictures you think worth selling, and you are to put your own price on them.’

‘Oh, thank you.’ Smiles beamed all over Catty’s face now; she could scarcely keep from clapping her hands.

‘I never saw you look so childish before,’ said Mr Ellworthy. ‘It is a relief to see any behaviour on your part which matches the ordinary girl of your age. But now I must damp your ardour—suppose you don’t get the scholarship?’

‘I have no chance of getting it at all during the next session.’

‘Why is that?’

‘Partly on account of father’s illness. I was not able to conform to all the necessary rules.’

‘Then, if you don’t come to live with us, you will have no art for at least a year?’

Catalina hung her head.

‘I know,’ she said, ‘it seems hopeless.’

‘No, it is not hopeless, little girl; not while you have your benevolent uncle in a benevolent mood. You run upstairs this minute, and put on your hat, and we’ll go out together and have a talk about this.’

‘What do you mean to do, Uncle James?’

‘Well, this. Suppose I were to give you the money for your art fees for the next session.’

‘Oh, uncle, you don’t mean it. Oh, it seems quite too much to take, and perhaps after all, mother could manage.’

‘Look here, Catalina, I forbid you to worry your poor mother about this matter. I never in all my life saw a woman age so in the time—why, she is not forty yet. She was married when she was quite a child, and I declare she looks fifty if she looks a day. Once for all I forbid your mother to be worried.’

‘Very well, Uncle James,’ answered Catalina, in a submissive voice.

‘I have taken you up, and I am not going to drop you. How much are these precious fees?’

‘Fifteen guineas a year.’

‘Fifteen guineas a year! A mere nothing. Consider them paid, my dear.’

‘Uncle James !’

‘Stay, don’t thank me until you know more. How do you propose to come up from Surrey every day to work at your school ?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘I wonder if you could be induced to live away from that father of yours from Monday to Saturday of each week.’

‘Yes,’ replied Catalina, ‘I think I could do that when so much—so much depends on it.’

‘I am glad you have so much sense. Now, is there any one who would board you in town, close to the school, I mean ? Is there a respectable, comfortable sort of house where a little, wild, daring girl like yourself could be placed ?’

‘Oh, Uncle James, how splendid you are. Why, of course, there are plenty of boarding-houses quite close to the school, and half the students live in them.’

‘Do you know one that is more specially recommended than the others ?’

‘Of course, Mrs Gillespie’s is the best of all; but then it is the most expensive.’

‘We won’t think of expense in this matter, Catalina. Now, is that hat on ?’

‘I’ll fly and get it on, Uncle James.’

‘Then we’ll just stroll over to Mrs Gillespie’s and see what can be managed.’

Catalina rushed from the room. On the stairs she met Madeline.

‘Well, Catty,’ cried Madeline, ‘is it all arranged? Are we to spend next winter together?’

‘No, dear Maddie. Oh, it is so kind of you; but it cannot be done—it cannot, really.’

Catalina dashed past her cousin and flew to her room. Madeline stood on the stairs and watched her with twinkling eyes. In a moment Catalina had put on her hat and flown downstairs to join her uncle.

‘Now, I am ready,’ she said, looking into his face.

‘Then we’ll go,’ he said.

A few minutes’ quick walking brought them to Mrs Gillespie’s large boarding-house, which was situated at right angles to the great quadrangle which contained the Randall School of Art. Mrs Gillespie happened to be at home. By strange good luck she also said that she had one vacant room for the beginning of the session. She and Mr Ellworthy had a short but satisfactory interview. She mentioned her terms, two guineas a week, which seemed to Catalina outrageously large. Mr Ellworthy evidently thought nothing of them, and agreed to pay the money without demur.

‘You are responsible to me for all money matters,’ said the uncle, as he was leaving the house, ‘and please understand that I want this little girl to have every comfort. She is to be in the position of a parlour boarder, whatever that old-fashioned word signifies.’

‘I think I understand,’ said Mrs Gillespie.

‘Well, see you treat her well; give her the best

food, extra milk, and wine if necessary. She is growing fast, and I should like to see more colour in her cheeks.'

'I will do everything possible for her,' said Mrs Gillespie.

'Thank you, thank you; keep her in health whatever you do. She is going to make her name and her mark in the world some day.'

'She would not be Professor Gifford's daughter if she did not do that,' said Mrs Gillespie, looking with immense respect first at the rich uncle and then at his niece.

Catalina left the house feeling as if there were wings to her feet.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CARICATURES AGAIN.



ALL delightful things having happened together, Catalina prepared to enjoy herself during the remainder of the summer. It seemed to her as if clouds could never rise again on her horizon. The house in Surrey proved as pleasant as such an old-fashioned house would be to town-bred folk. The Professor grew better hour by hour, and Catty and her father between them nursed their daydreams, and lived one for the other. Yes, the world was golden now to Catalina; she felt assured of success. God's goodness seemed to keep a psalm always singing in her heart; her bright eyes shone with pure happiness, her gay laughter was heard all over the house. Day by day fresh beauty seemed to come into her speaking face. It was her wish to make her whole life a dedication to the best of all; her art should raise her. If she had talent she would use it for the highest purposes.

The day at last came when she had to say

good-bye to home, and take up her abode at Mrs Gillespie's boarding-house. It was true she was to return every Saturday, but she was no longer to be quite the home-bird. The Professor was now to all appearance as well as ever; Mrs Gifford was quite able to look after him, and Catalina could go to the work she loved best with a light heart.

Mrs Gillespie's boarding-house was a particularly comfortable one; it was the most expensive in the whole long row of boarding-houses, and was considered a luxurious home for those art students who were supposed to have money. Catalina was surprised and pleased to find when she entered the long and pretty drawing-room that Margaret Ashton and Lucy Gray were amongst the boarders.

'Well, by all that's wonderful,' cried Lucy, when she saw Catty enter the room. 'What in the world are you doing here, little professor?'

'Why, I have come to live here,' said Catalina. 'Oh, such a lot has happened since I saw you last, Lucy.' She ran up to her friend and kissed her affectionately.

'I am delighted to see you,' said Lucy. 'You must tell me all your story presently; I see you have a great deal to say by your face.'

'I did not know you lived here,' said Catalina in reply.

'I have not done so until now; but my people have all made up their minds to winter abroad, and as

nothing would induce me to give up dear Professor Forde and his admirable instruction, I have come to Mrs Gillespie until Christmas.'

'Come here this minute, Catty, and kiss me,' said Margaret Ashton. 'Have you any inquiries to make of me, puss? Don't you know that I have always lived here during term time?'

'I did not know it,' answered Catalina; she went up to Margaret, who put her arm round her waist.

'You look well, child,' she said, 'and how bright your eyes are.'

'I am very well and happy,' answered Catalina.

'Is your father better now?'

'Yes, much better; he is getting quite well again.'

At that moment the drawing-room door was opened, and Rhoda Stanford came in.

'Here I am,' she said. 'I arrived half an hour ago. How do you do, Lucy?—How do you do, Margaret?—Why, Catalina Gifford, what are you doing here?'

'I am going to live here,' said Catty.

'To live here?' replied Rhoda, opening her eyes.

'And why not?' interrupted Lucy. 'Has not Catalina as good a right to the comforts of Mrs Gillespie's boarding-house as any one else?'

'Of course, of course,' said Rhoda; 'only I did not know.' She pouted her lips, and looked disdainful. Catalina coloured.

'You, Rhoda, are a stranger here, too,' said Margaret, keeping fast hold of Catty's hand while she was

speaking; 'you surely have never lived in one of the boarding-houses before?'

Rhoda, who had sunk into the most comfortable arm-chair in the room, slightly turned her head.

'No,' she replied; 'but this time I have absolutely made up my mind to give myself up to art. Art is a hard mistress,' she continued, 'and will never be satisfied with half measures.'

None of the other girls replied to this; they knew too well how futile Rhoda's attempts at art must always be. Some other art students at this moment entered the room, and Catty and Margaret found themselves pushed into a corner.

'I am really delighted to have you here, Catty,' said Margaret; 'but now that we are quite by ourselves for a moment, let me whisper something to you.'

'What is that?'

'Have as little as possible to do with Rhoda. I know it is uncharitable of me to speak as I am going to do, but there is something about that girl I cannot bear. For some reason unknown, she seems to have a spite against you.'

'Oh, I don't think so,' replied Catalina.

'Yes, but she has. She will never give you a good word if she can help it. I see she is as jealous as possible of your being here. Perhaps she is also jealous of your talent, Catty. Well, be on your guard when with her, and now don't let us talk any more on such a disagreeable subject. We begin to work

hard to-morrow, don't we? I suppose you intend to carry all before you.'

'Not all by any means,' answered Catalina. 'You know I must not compete for the scholarship this session, for I did not try for the last composition; I could not help that, because father was so ill. But I shall certainly do drawings for all the compositions this term, for I feel bound in honour to have a struggle for that scholarship next session.'

'We shall none of us have the privilege of trying for the scholarship this year,' said Margaret. 'You have not forgotten, have you, that horrid affair about the caricatures? Well, Professor Forde is still very angry, and he sticks firmly to his resolution that his scholarship shall not be competed for until the guilty girl confesses.'

'I cannot think who could have done the drawings,' said Catalina.

'Nor can I,' echoed Margaret. 'To caricature well is a very uncommon gift,' she added.

Catalina coloured faintly.

Margaret suddenly sprang to her feet.

'I feel restless and wretched about this thing,' she said. 'It throws a cloud over us all. You know the whole subject is to be reopened to-morrow. By the way, Catty, have you yet seen the caricatures?'

'No, I did not have an opportunity of looking at them. You remember father got ill just when the fuss was at its height.'

‘Of course I remember, and I was so sorry you were not in the school; all the rest of us were put on our word of honour as to whether we were guilty or not. Poor Catty, you have yet to be questioned; but never mind: if we were all as innocent as you are, we should not have much to fear?’

‘I should like to see the caricatures very much,’ said Catalina.

‘Well, perhaps we can get into the school. I know exactly where to look for the professors’ easels. Let us have a try. There is no saying but you may be able to throw some light on the subject.’

‘I don’t suppose I can do that, but of course I should like to see them.’

‘Come with me at once; we shall just have time before supper.’

The two girls left the room together; they went downstairs and had a short interview with Mrs Gillespie.

‘You know, of course,’ said Margaret, ‘that we are all in trouble about that mysterious occurrence which took place last term.’

‘You allude to the caricatures on the professors’ easels?’ said Mrs Gillespie. ‘Well, I consider it a shameful thing to do; kinder and more considerate men never lived.’

‘It was disgraceful,’ said Margaret. ‘But now, Mrs Gillespie, this young lady, Miss Gifford, has never had an opportunity of looking at the easels

since the occurrence took place. You know she had to leave before last term was over, on account of her father's illness. Do you think you could manage to give us the key of the studio? I should like her to see the easels to-night.'

'Well, my dear, there can be no harm in letting you use my private key. Bring it back to me when you have done with it.'

Mrs Gillespie produced the key from a drawer, and Margaret and Catty entered the wide gates which led into the quadrangle; a few moments later they found themselves in the large studio devoted to the study of animal painting. The three easels which had been tampered with were placed by themselves at the farther end of the room. The girls approached them, and Margaret turned them round for Catty to have a good view. The caricatures had been done rather deep into the wood in ink; they were sketched in masterly fashion, in different guises and attitudes round the edges of the easels. There was a considerable amount of force in the drawings, which did not look in the least like the work of a novice.

'This is what puzzles every one,' said Margaret; 'the caricatures are so good, and as far as we can tell, not a girl in the studio has got the special gift. Did you ever see anything so disgraceful in your life, Catty? Here, look at this ridiculous portrait of dear Professor Forde. Of course it is true; it is too true. How often have I not seen him just in that attitude,

just bending forward so, and screwing up his eyes. Can't you almost hear him say, "Not quite so wooden, Miss Jones," or "What about the anatomy of that leg, Miss Smith?" Oh, you know, don't you, Catty, his exact words? He is just going to pounce upon some unlucky student at this moment. Oh, and here is Mr Fortescue; can you not almost see him blushing? Oh, and dear, dear *fat* Professor Johnson; disgraceful as it all is, I cannot help laughing.'

Catalina remained absolutely silent.

'What is the matter, Catty?' said her friend suddenly. 'Oh, I know you are shocked,' she added, 'but are you not amused as well? Aren't the drawings clever?'

'Margaret,' said Catty. Her voice came low, almost from her throat; she put up her hand to loosen the collar of her dress.

'I don't understand what this means,' she continued; 'those caricatures have'— She paused again; she could scarcely get out her words.

'What can be the matter with you, Catty? Do speak. Is it possible you know anything about this matter?'

'I do not know who copied those drawings on the easels,' said Catalina; 'but of course they are copies.'

'Copies? Copies of what?'

'Oh Margaret, how am I to tell you? Of course they have been copied.'

‘What is it, my dear ; Catty, do speak.’

‘They are like, exactly like some drawings I once made,’ said Catalina.

‘You ? Can you caricature ? Yes, of course, I remember now you told me you could.’

‘I can, Margaret. Oh, I can, and I used to be so fond of it. Oh, this quite frightens me. What can it mean, Margaret ?’

Catalina sank down on the nearest chair ; she could not take her fascinated eyes from the drawings.

‘You had much better tell me everything, Catty ; there is nothing for it but for me to know the simple truth.’ Margaret’s voice was full of distress ; there was even a terrible note of distrust in it.

‘Margaret, you must know that I am innocent, that I had nothing whatever to do with this’—here Catalina pointed to the easels. ‘Do you think for a single moment I would dare to caricature the professors in—in *public* ?’

‘Then you did caricature them in private ?’

‘Yes, but only for my very own self. I cannot think what made me do it ; but one morning, during last term, an overpowering desire to sketch Professor Forde just as he looked came over me, and I scribbled something in charcoal on a half-sheet of drawing-paper. Then I made a sketch of Mr Fertescue and another of Professor Johnson, and then I think I added one or two sketches of the most pronounced-looking of the students. From that hour to now I

forgot all about my work. My impression is that I tore up the paper. Of course I could not have done so, Margaret; for some one must have picked it up, and—and copied my work on to the easels. Oh, what is to be done ?'

'This certainly looks very bad,' said Margaret.

'But you believe me; say at least that you believe me. You know I could not be mean, that nothing would induce me'—

'I know, child, of course,' said Margaret; 'but now, do let me think for a moment. Oh, I am not blaming you, Catty; but the thing really looks so ugly. If what you say is true, and of course it must be, there is malice somewhere, and clever, dreadful malice, too. Catty, please stay where you are while I fetch Lucy Gray. She is your friend as well as mine. You must tell her exactly what you have just told me.'

Margaret ran from the studio.

Catalina left by herself, went up again to the easels, and began to examine the caricatures. There was not the least manner of doubt that they were excellent and accurate copies of her own work. Just the pose, just the air, the indescribable look of life which she had so faithfully reproduced, were once again perceptible on the margins of the easels. She pressed her hand to her throbbing forehead: a sense of bewilderment made her almost giddy.

'What can I have done with the charcoal drawings?' she said to herself. 'My impression is that I sketched

them on a half-sheet of paper ; but perhaps I really did them in my drawing-book.' She then remembered that she had never taken her net bag from school. A thought of the last morning she had spent there rushed back to her mind ; she was sent for suddenly to come home when her father had been taken ill ; of course she had forgotten all about her bag, about everything but just the one supreme passion of her life. Her bag was, therefore, still at the school, and her drawing-book was in all probability in it too. If she could only find Jackson, the caretaker, he would give her her bag.

Footsteps were heard approaching, and Lucy accompanied by Margaret entered the studio. Margaret had already given her an outline of the case ; her round, good-humoured face looked pale and concerned.

'This is a very nasty business,' said Margaret. 'My impression is that some malicious person has conceived this plot to ruin Catty. I never did like Rhoda ; I am convinced that she is at the bottom of this business.'

'Really, Margaret, that is uncharitable of you,' cried Lucy. 'I don't care for Rhoda either, not a bit ; but it is unfair to saddle her, or any one, with so dreadful a crime. Besides, she is not half, nor quarter, clever enough to do anything of that sort.'

'Oh, please, Lucy, don't say that you believe that I did it,' cried Catty.

'No, I don't believe that for a moment,' said Lucy,

'but, all the same, it is but fair to tell you, Catty, that things look very bad. Of course there was not the least harm in your drawing caricatures for your own private amusement; the sin was'—

'There was no sin,' said Catalina, colouring high. 'I made the caricatures in an idle moment, and my impression is that I tore up the paper.'

'Well, you evidently did not. Now, let us sit here and talk the thing over. We must really make up our minds what is to be done, and at once. Can you not recall what you did with your drawings, Catalina?'

'I think I tore them up, but I may be mistaken. I'll go and find Jackson, and ask him for my bag. I may have made the sketches in my drawing-book, but that certainly is not my own impression.'

'Well, run and fetch the bag.'

After some little difficulty, Catalina found Jackson. He knew all about her bag, and told her where he had put it.

'Here it is, miss, in this drawer,' he said. 'I took care of it for you, and laid it here to be out of harm's way. There's nothing whatever in it but two or three bits of paper.'

'Please, give it to me,' said Catty. Her hand trembled. The man gave it without a word. Just as she was leaving the dressing-room he called after her:

'I'd be right glad to know, Miss Gifford, how the Professor is.'

‘Oh, he is nearly quite well again,’ replied the little girl, ‘thank you very much for asking about him.’ Her heart was too full to allow her to say another word just then. She joined Margaret and Lucy in the studio.

‘There is nothing in the bag,’ she said, ‘except torn paper; at least, I suppose it is torn. Take it out, please, Margaret, and look for yourself.’

She sat down on the nearest chair; her legs trembled, her hands trembled; she had difficulty in keeping herself quiet. From the serene blue of the bluest of skies to this darkness was a leap so sudden that poor Catalina nearly lost her self-control. Margaret took up the bag and untied the string. Then she put in her hand and drew out one or two torn pieces of paper, also a half-sheet of note-paper which was scribbled over with perfect fac-similes of the caricatures on the easels.

‘No, those are not mine,’ said poor Catalina, ‘but they are copied from mine. Mine were done in charcoal, these are done in pen and ink. Oh Margaret, who could have got hold of my charcoal drawings?’

‘Who, indeed,’ echoed Margaret.

Meanwhile, Lucy stood quite silent; Catty with a face the colour of death glanced from one girl to the other.

‘What do you advise me to do, Margaret?’ she said at last, in a voice of despair.

‘You must tell the truth, I am afraid,’ said Margaret.

'I fear also,' she added, 'that things will go badly with you. Of course, Lucy, and I believe that you are innocent.'

'Oh Margaret! oh Lucy!' cried the child. 'Oh, this will kill me—it will kill me.' All the foreign blood in her passionate nature seemed to awaken.

'And I was so happy,' she continued, 'and everything seemed so perfect.' She covered her face with her hands, and gave way to the most overwhelming grief. 'To think of it, Margaret,' she continued; 'to think of Uncle James, and of father, and of their goodness. Oh, Margaret and Lucy, what am I to do?'

'It is about the most shameful thing I ever heard of,' said Lucy; she glanced at Margaret as she spoke. 'Of course the poor little thing is innocent,' she added.

'Without any doubt the guilty person is Rhoda,' said Margaret. 'How she managed to get hold of Catalina's drawings is a mystery, but get them she did. This accounts for her queer manner, and the spiteful way she always speaks of Catty. There is no surer way to hate another than first to injure that person. Oh, the whole thing is a horrid and dirty trick. Rhoda has managed very cleverly to saddle the consequences of her own act on poor Catalina; for there is little doubt that things will go hard with her to-morrow.'

The girls talked together for a little longer, and Catalina presently regained enough composure to be able to listen calmly to the advice of her companions.

'You must tell the simple truth,' they both said. 'You will, of course, be questioned to-morrow, and you must tell what you have just told us. It is doubtful whether you will be believed; but there is nothing for it but to tell the truth.'

'Of course,' answered Catalina. 'It is all dreadful,' she added. 'I feel as if my life had suddenly come to a sort of end. Oh, I don't know what I feel; I suppose it is despair.'

'No, no, Catty; try not to give up hope,' said Lucy, kissing her affectionately. 'Remember, at least, whatever happens, Margaret and I are your friends. We won't leave a stone unturned to get the rightful culprit to confess, and now we must go back, or people will wonder what we are doing.'

CHAPTER XVII.

IN TROUBLE.



HAT poor Catalina went through during that miserable night no words can describe. Suddenly from the height of bliss, she was whirled to the depths of despair.

She could not see her way a single step.

This was not the first occasion on which the little girl had been called upon to fight dragons, but surely never before had a dragon like the present stood in her path.

At an early hour the following morning, Lucy Gray came into Catty's bedroom.

‘I guessed you would be looking something like you do,’ she said. ‘Heavy eyes, black shadows under them, white face, and all the rest. Now, let me tell you, Catalina, this will never do. You must not give way at the onset in this fashion. You must rub some colour into your cheeks, and pluck up your spirits, and take a capital breakfast. In short, you have got to act as an innocent person would act.’

‘I am innocent,’ said Catalina; ‘but I feel now that I was mad to draw the caricatures.’

‘Nonsense! The only thing that could be said about that is that it was a little ill-advised; the fact is, you are in a funk. I want to get you right out of it. Above all things, I don’t wish that spiteful Rhoda to see you looking as you do now.’

‘Lucy, what ought I to do?’

‘Look here; do be led by me. Don’t appear at the general breakfast this morning. I’ll run downstairs and bring something up. Half of the students in this house have their breakfasts upstairs, so there will be nothing remarkable in your not coming down. I’ll fetch your breakfast in a jiffy.’

Lucy rushed from the room. She presently returned with a tray of tempting food, and put it down on a little table by the window.

‘Come,’ she said, ‘here you are; you must swallow every bit. Is not this nice coffee? and the toast in that little rack is really quite presentable. Now, then, that’s better. We shall soon be going across to the school; Margaret and I are both going to wait for you; we three will enter the school together.’

‘Oh, thank you; you are good to me,’ said Catalina.

‘I have one last word for you, child, and then I must be off. Both Margaret and I have talked over everything. We have made up our minds absolutely and completely to believe in you. Now does not that fact help you a bit?’

‘Oh, it does, more than words can say.’ Catty threw her arms round her friend’s neck and kissed her passionately.

‘You will soon see the sunny side of this scrape, Catalina; and pray remember that genius always had and always has enemies in this world. Meet us in the hall in five minutes, and keep up your pecker.’

The first morning of term was always an exciting day. Friends who had been parted for months were now meeting again. New students were looking anxiously around them, wondering what their niche would be in the great school, and how their companions would receive them. The large art shop round the corner was doing a thriving trade. Girls and boys were rushing in and out, carrying rolls of paper, boxes of charcoal, tubes of colour, and other materials for their art. Then the professors were seen coming in from different parts. Presently the great clock boomed out the hour of ten. Catty, who had been watching this scene from her window, snatched up her canvas bag with all its tell-tale misery within, gave one wild glance at her white face in the glass, uttered a frantic prayer for courage, and rushed downstairs. As she did so, Rhoda came slowly out of the breakfast-room.

‘Well, Margaret,’ she said, going up to Margaret Ashton as she spoke, ‘I am glad you are not off yet; we may as well go across to the school together. Oh, Catalina, how do you do?’ She glanced at Catty’s bag,

which she saw hanging on her arm. 'I expect we'll have rather an exciting time this morning,' she continued. 'Don't forget, Catalina, that the question which was put to all the rest of us has yet to be put to you. Of course I allude to the mystery with regard to the caricatures. Have you forgotten that occurrence?'

'No, I do not forget,' said Catalina.

'Don't bother her now, Rhoda,' said Lucy Gray; 'come along with me.' She tucked her hand through Rhoda's arm. This familiarity was not at all in accordance with Lucy's general behaviour; and Rhoda, who longed to make her her friend, was so much delighted that she said nothing more about the caricatures.

Margaret and Catty followed somewhat slowly, behind the other pair. They entered the studio, and Margaret whispered to Catalina:

'Get out your easel, begin your work just as if nothing whatever had happened, and don't forget that Lucy and I believe in you.'

'I'll cling to that, Margaret,' murmured poor Catty.

Two or three girls ran up to greet her. Their affectionate words and looks of real pleasure helped to strengthen her a little. She found her easel, and put it in a good position. A very fine race-horse was led in by a groom; it was quickly got into position, and the girls pinned fresh paper on their easels, and those who could paint took out their canvases. There was a little

hush at this moment, for the two younger professors and Mr Fortescue entered the room. The usual greetings at the beginning of term took place; the old students were affectionately remembered and spoken to, and the new girls were encouraged and shown how to begin their work. Then, as his custom was, Professor Forde went up to the end of the room, where the model stood, and gave a little lecture. He pointed out the special points of this horse, said some words as to the importance of the work which was now just recommencing, and then turned to begin his duties of going from easel to easel to superintend and encourage each special student's efforts. At this moment, Mr Fortescue appeared and said something in Professor Forde's ear.

'True, I had forgotten,' he replied, a slight frown coming between his brows. He returned once more to his place at the head of the room.

'Mr Fortescue has reminded me of something very painful,' he said, 'and I find it necessary to add some words to those I have already spoken. I have to remind the students before me of a disagreeable duty. A disgraceful act was perpetrated during last term. The deed was done, not in a spirit of fun, for the most reckless fun may be and will be forgiven, but in an insolent spirit of rebellion and bravado. I allude to a subject which must be known to every girl now present, with the exception of those who have just joined the school. The other professors and I have

made up our minds to find out the truth, with regard to the pen and ink caricatures of Professor Johnson, Mr Fortescue, and myself—which have been sketched on our easels. The girl who has done this wanton mischief, who has perpetrated this unkind and heartless joke, must confess her wrong-doing, or her fellow-students will be implicated in her own disgrace. I have already put the question to the school, but I will repeat it now. Those who are innocent hold up their hands.'

In a moment each pair of hands in the school was raised; there was a perfect forest of hands, some eager shuffling of excited feet was heard, the intense excitement of the moment seemed to get into the very air. Catalina felt her face growing white; she had a sensation as if cold air was blowing upon her. She wondered if she should faint. She did not dare to raise her eyes, although she longed to do so. No one noticed her. Each student was absorbed in her own reflections, in vaguely wondering how the scandal was going to end.

'The caricatures did not appear without hands,' said Professor Forde again; 'some one is guilty. I have already questioned each girl separately with the exception of one. That one girl happened to be absent during the end of last term; but as I fully believe in her, I will not do her the dishonour of asking her separately if she knows anything about this matter.'

Here there was a little chuckle, and some girls said 'Bravo' under their breaths. Catty felt the hand

of an affectionate fellow-student laid on her shoulder ; she was too agitated to look up.

‘But,’ continued Professor Forde, ‘the present state of things is much too serious to remain without a thorough investigation. I am forced to take extreme measures, not only to secure the confession of the real culprit, but also to prevent the repetition of such a dastardly and cowardly outrage. If order is not insisted on, if respect is not shown in a school of this kind to your teachers, girls, it is impossible for us to do you any justice. One of you has done this deed. Girls of the Randall School, it rests with yourselves now, either to remain under suspicion for the whole of the present session, in which case the scholarship will be withdrawn, or to induce the guilty girl to come forward and save her companions.’

Professor Forde paused, and looked down the long room. Many of the girls with crimson faces and bright eyes were gazing fixedly at him. Some, however, sat with lowered eyes. Amongst that group was Catty. She sat as usual well to the front. Her easel partly shaded her face ; her thick curly locks also acted as a veil. For a moment she had a wild desire to say nothing, not to expose her terrible secret.

‘Professor Forde fully believes in me now,’ she said to herself ; ‘when I tell him the truth he will suspect—oh, he will do more, he will really think that I am guilty.’

‘You have all just declared your innocence,’ con-

tinued the Professor, ' and yet assuredly one of you is guilty. I have now something further to say. If at this moment the girl who is really guilty will have the courage to come forward, and make a complete confession, I will forgive her ; she shall receive no punishment, she shall not be expelled from the school. My full and perfect forgiveness will be accorded to her, and the shame will be removed from her fellow-students.'

The Professor paused and looked anxiously around him ; his fine face was full of feeling, his eyes wore a pleading glance. He seemed to beseech by his very attitude the guilty one to rise to greatness by the agony of a true confession.

' One of you assuredly is guilty,' he said again. ' I cannot look into your hearts, but neither can I believe the impossible. Those caricatures were made by human hands. The professors would assuredly not caricature themselves ; the only other person who has access to this studio is the attendant, Jackson, who cannot draw a single stroke. One of you, in a spirit of mischief, perhaps at first not realising what she was doing, has been guilty of this crime. Black and disgraceful as it was at first, the sin of concealing it is far and away the greater sin. Whoever you are, will you not confess ? I know the guilty person is now before me ; will you not save your companions ? Will you not lift the burden from your own conscience, and save your soul alive ? At this moment there is free forgiveness.'

There was no reply. The silence might have been felt, a pin might have been heard to drop. The Professor waited a full minute, then he changed his position, and spoke in a different tone; there was sternness in his voice.

‘May I speak to you, Professor Johnson?’ he called out.

Professor Johnson walked up the room; he and Professor Forde talked together for a moment in low tones.

‘It is our disagreeable duty,’ said Professor Forde then, ‘to announce that the moment of grace is past. Professor Johnson and I will not leave a stone unturned to expose the guilty girl; and whenever she is discovered, she will be expelled from the Randall School.’

Again that fearful silence; several of the students turned from red to white. One or two of them said afterwards that they wondered the loud beating of their hearts was not heard.

‘I have another question to ask,’ said Professor Forde. ‘Can any girl in the school help to throw light on the mystery? Has any one anything at all to say, which will help Professor Johnson and myself to discover the guilty person?’

To the amazement of every one, at these words, Catalina Gifford rose to her feet.

‘I can say something,’ she whispered.

‘You, Catalina,’ said Professor Forde.

‘Yes,’ she replied.

‘Speak louder, please, Miss Gifford,’ said Professor Johnson.

‘Yes, my dear, come up here,’ said Professor Forde kindly. ‘Come and stand near me,’ he continued. ‘It is brave of you to tell what you know,’ he half-whispered in Catalina’s ear. ‘It is what I should have expected of your father’s daughter.’

Some of the girls noticed that Catalina wore hanging on her arm her little string bag. When she found herself standing on the platform by Professor Forde’s side she looked for a moment at the sea of faces. They were all blurred and dim to her, until suddenly one stood out distinct and clear. This face wore a malignant light; there was also a look half of terror half of relief round the lips and eyes.

‘Rhoda knows the truth,’ thought the child. ‘What does it, what can it all mean? Oh, I see the truth in Rhoda’s face. Oh God, give—give me strength.’

‘Now, Catalina, speak up and tell us exactly what you know,’ said Professor Forde.

‘I believe I can throw some light on the mystery,’ said Catalina.

‘What have you to say?’

‘First of all I have something to show.’ She opened her bag as she spoke, took out the half-sheet of paper, smoothed it and gave it to Professor Forde. He glanced at it in astonishment. A queer expression crossed his face, it was the first withering breath of suspicion. He gave Catalina a sharp glance, and then

passed the paper on to Professor Johnson. Professor Johnson looked at it and gave it to Mr Fortescue, who was standing not far off.

‘How did that paper get into your bag, Miss Gifford?’ said Professor Forde.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Catalina.

‘Do you know anything about the paper itself?’

‘I know nothing.’

‘Can you not tell us how it got into your bag?’

‘I cannot; I don’t know how it got there.’

‘Have you nothing more to say? Pray speak up. Remember how important this is.’

‘I have something more to say, and I will speak up,’ said Catalina, with sudden courage. At that moment her fear seemed to take wings and leave her. She was no more afraid, just then, than she had been a couple of months ago in her uncle’s office at Manchester. Then she was fighting for her father; now she was fighting for herself, her own future, her own character. It was right that she should fight; her courage should not fail her.

‘I found the paper in my bag last night,’ she began. ‘I knew very little about the caricatures until last night. I was away at the end of the term because my father was very ill. During the holidays I met Rhoda Stanford, and she told me that all the students had been questioned with regard to the caricatures, but that no light had been thrown on the mystery. When I came here last night Margaret Ashton spoke

to me about it; I told her that I had not yet seen the caricatures, and she came with me to the studio, and I looked at the drawings on your easel, Professor Forde, and also on the easels of Professor Johnson and Mr Fortescue. I'—here her voice faltered for an instant, then grew firm and bold—'I knew the caricatures.'

'You knew them?' said Professor Forde. 'You knew who had done the work?'

'No, I knew nothing about that.'

'I cannot understand you. How could you know the caricatures without knowing their author?'

'I knew the caricatures,' continued Catalina. 'Because—because,' she added boldly, 'they are copies.'

'Copies? From what?'

'From some work of mine.'

There came a sort of prolonged sigh from every girl in the big room. Professor Forde's face grew dark.

'Then you, Catalina, you are the guilty person?'

'No, sir,' answered Catalina, raising her clear, dark eyes to his face, 'I am not.'

'Pray explain yourself; you are too ambiguous for me. Either you drew the caricatures or you did not.'

'I drew them, sir, and yet I did not put them on the easels. I will tell you everything, if you will give me a moment. I have always been fond of caricaturing. I used to make sketches of people when I

was a little girl. I just exaggerated a little, and then the sketches looked comical. Father used to tell me I might get into trouble some day if I sketched my own friends, so in a great measure I gave it up; but one day during last term the temptation came over me very strongly. I saw you, Professor, and I seized a piece of charcoal and some drawing-paper, and I made a likeness of you. It was like you, but of course it was a caricature. I did not for a moment mean it unkindly, but the impulse came over me and I could not resist it. You had often looked just as I sketched you. I made you look exactly the same as the sketch on that paper and the sketch in pen and ink on your easel. Then I made caricatures of Professor Johnson, and Mr Fortescue, and of two or three of the girls in the school. To do this amused me. I did not think any one saw me at my work, and it was my impression that I tore up the paper and threw it away.'

'Well,' said Professor Forde. 'Go on.'

'That is all I know, sir. When I saw the caricatures yesterday, on the easels, I recognised them at once as copies of my own work. I was dreadfully puzzled and dreadfully unhappy. I could not imagine how any one could have got access to my drawings. Then it occurred to me that, after all, I might not have made the sketches on a separate piece of paper, but might have done them in my drawing-book—so I ran to get my bag, which was left here during the holidays. I found the bag, but there was no drawing-book in

it. I remembered then that I had taken it home. There was some torn paper in the bag, and this half-sheet of paper. I unfolded it and found that it contained copies of my charcoal drawings in pen and ink. I do not know how the paper got into my bag. That is all the light I can throw upon the mystery, Professor Forde; that is all that I can tell you.'

Catty's voice rang out quite loudly. As she said the last words, she looked boldly down the long room. Rhoda's face was ghastly, there were ugly blotches of colour on it; she was fidgeting her feet up and down in a nervous manner.

'Keep still, can't you, Rhoda,' said a girl who sat near her.

There was a profound and awful silence in the room.

'Your story is a very strange one, and very difficult to believe,' said Professor Forde then to Catalina. 'I must say plainly that if I did not know you so well, if I did not believe that your father's daughter could scarcely sink to anything so base, untrue, mean, and despicable, it would be my painful duty'—

'No, no; don't say that,' cried Catalina. She covered her face; her voice had risen to a great cry of pain.

'Hush, you must listen to me. You have acknowledged that you are the originator of the caricatures.'

'Yes, I made the original drawings; I never copied them in pen and ink, I never transferred them to the easels,'

‘You cannot tell me who did that?’

‘No, Professor Forde.’

‘Very well. Seeing that you are your father’s daughter, that up to the present you have done nothing which could in the least disgrace your character, I will give you a week, a whole week, to discover the person who stole your charcoal-drawings and made pen and ink sketches of them on our easels. If at the end of the week no light can be thrown upon this mystery, it will be my painful, my extremely painful duty, to believe that you yourself, Catalina, are the guilty person—that you have confessed half but not all. In that case, my poor child’—

‘Yes, sir, in that case?’ said Catalina. She raised her eyes now, and looked full at the Professor.

‘In that case, it will be my painful duty to report you to the Head of the Randall School, who will immediately expel you.’



CHAPTER XVIII.

TO THE RESCUE.



'E must see Catalina through this trouble,' said Margaret Ashton.

She was seated in her own little private sitting-room in Mrs Gillespie's boarding-house. Margaret was one of the richest girls in the house, and in addition to a bedroom had this little room for her own. She had invited Lucy Gray and two other girls, sisters of the name of Ferrier, to meet her there in order to consult over the caricature scandal, as she termed it.

'I will do anything in the world for Catty,' said Lucy, 'but the thing is what to do. There is no doubt she has got herself into a terrible scrape by her confession of this morning.'

'Don't you respect her for it?' said Margaret. 'Of course we urged her to confess, but she might in the first instance have concealed it. For my part I wonder that Professor Forde can doubt her.'

‘I don’t believe he does doubt her really,’ said Annie Ferrier; ‘but of course he has every other girl in the school to consider. Catalina confesses that she was the originator of the caricatures. What we have now to find out is, how the pen and ink copy got into her bag—who stole the charcoal drawings—who copied them in pen and ink, and who transferred the copy to the masters’ easels.’

‘That last is the point of points,’ said Lucy. She looked again at Margaret as she spoke. ‘I think,’ she said, after a pause, ‘that it is your duty, Margaret, to state your suspicions.’

‘I hate doing so, but I believe you are right, Lucy,’ answered Margaret. ‘If we are not very careful now—if we don’t act to the very best of our ability, one of the cleverest and nicest girls in the school may be ruined for life.’

‘Well, speak out, Margaret,’ said Annie Ferrier.

‘The fact is this, Annie. Catalina, for no apparent reason, has an enemy in the school.’

‘I wonder,’ began Dora Ferrier.

‘What do you wonder, Dora?’

‘If your thought and mine coincides.’

‘There is no use in beating about the bush any longer,’ said Margaret—‘the girl who hates Catalina is Rhoda Stanford. Now, we ought to find out why she hates her.’

‘I think I can throw a little light on that mystery,’ said Dora.

‘Please, Dora, speak,’ said Lucy; ‘we shall be most thankful if you can give us the faintest clue to go upon.’

‘I guess,’ continued Dora, ‘why Rhoda dislikes Catalina.’

‘Well, do go on.’

‘I happened during last term to sit close to Rhoda and Catty. Soon after Rhoda’s arrival at the school I heard her asking Catty what she thought of her work—you know Rhoda’s style of art, don’t you?’

‘Perfectly, but we need not enter into that,’ said Margaret.

‘But it is necessary in order to explain why Rhoda should dislike Catalina. On a certain morning she asked Catty to examine her drawing. I must say Catty was blunt—she said quite frankly she did not like it. Rhoda turned crimson, for another student who was near laughed aloud.’

‘Have you anything else to say?’ asked Margaret.

‘There is a little more. One day towards the end of term, Rhoda put herself in such a position that Catalina could not see the boar-hound Roy. Catty was making a splendid drawing of him. Professor Forde came into the room and observed poor Catty’s discomfiture. He immediately desired Rhoda to move back, and put Catty into a good position—the very one which Rhoda herself had just occupied. I then heard him praise Catalina’s drawing to the detriment of Rhoda’s.’

‘Thank you, Dora,’ said Lucy. ‘I really do think that those circumstances are sufficient to make a girl like Rhoda jealous. From jealousy hatred quickly springs.’

‘It seems scarcely fair,’ said Annie then, ‘to suspect Rhoda of throwing such a dreadful crime upon poor Catalina.’

‘We know nothing, of course,’ said Margaret restlessly; ‘we only know that Rhoda is Catty’s enemy. Jealousy in a character like Rhoda’s is a powerful enough motive to work up to almost any result. I think—yes, I do think—that we have to look to Rhoda for the true solution of this dreadful mystery.’

‘There is one thing very much against that theory of yours,’ said Lucy, ‘and that is the simple fact that Rhoda is not clever enough even to *copy* Catty’s drawings. I don’t think Rhoda knows a single line of figure-drawing, and those caricatures, even though they are copies, are full of spirit and go. I am much afraid the fact of our dear Rhoda’s stupidity goes against your idea.’

‘I know it does,’ said Margaret, ‘but in her own way Rhoda is clever. I cannot help feeling sure,’ she added, ‘that she is at the bottom of the mystery.’

‘But you cannot prove your suspicions,’ said Lucy.

‘No, that is just it, but if only pressure could be brought to bear upon her, she might confess her guilt.’

‘Is there any one in all the world likely to be able to do that?’ asked Lucy.

‘I don’t know, and yet—let me think. I had a long talk with Catty last night—I find that she holds my opinions with regard to Rhoda; but under the circumstances she scarcely likes, poor little thing, to talk of them. She told me that she met Rhoda in Manchester, and that Rhoda is a cousin of some very great friends of her rich relations, the Ellworthys—people of the name of Trevelyan. Having ascertained this fact from Catty, I spoke to Rhoda on the subject of the Ellworthys this morning, and found that I struck a chord which responded very quickly to my touch. She evidently thinks a vast deal of the Ellworthys, and confesses that she never was so astonished in her life as when she found that Catty was their relation. In particular, Rhoda seems to have a great admiration for Madeline Ellworthy, who must be from her account a pretty child. Now Madeline almost worships Catalina—I wonder if by any possible means she could help us.’

‘Go on, Margaret,’ said Lucy; ‘I am certain by your manner that you have something more to say.’

‘Well, I have. My wish would be this, to write and explain everything fully to Madeline Ellworthy.’

‘But would Catalina like that?’

‘I am afraid,’ said Margaret, ‘we must not mind Catalina’s likes or dislikes in this matter. Our object is to clear her. If you girls consent, I will write myself to Madeline, giving her the full story as briefly and

frankly as I can. I will then ask her to go and see Miss Trevelyan. It strikes me that it is in that direction we ought to work in order to get Rhoda to betray herself.'

'Perhaps so,' said the other girls, but they looked dubious and uneasy.

'I am certain I am right,' continued Margaret; 'believe me, I would not for a small matter stir hand or foot. But for Catalina—for her art's sake, and because I am so certain of her innocence, I would do much. Oh yes, I will write to Miss Ellworthy to-day. A week is a very short time, remember; if we are to act at all we must act quickly.'

'Well,' said Lucy, rising restlessly from her chair, 'you may be right, Margaret. You have plenty of cleverness of your own; but it does seem a daring sort of thing to do, for of course you don't know the Ellworthys.'

'That is nothing; I know Catalina. Yes, I'll write my letter to-day.'

The letter was written and arrived at Donville Square by the first post on the following morning. Madeline, bright and happy, and greatly interested in her work of the term just beginning, came down as usual to breakfast. She seized her letter, tore it open, and began to read it eagerly; the colour flamed into her cheeks, she gave a cry of excitement, and then looked up at her mother.

'My dear Madeline, what can be the matter—who is your correspondent, my love?'

‘Oh mother,’ said Madeline, ‘I am so glad father has gone to his business. I could not really keep this to myself even for a moment, and you know he never allows me to talk or get excited at breakfast. Such a dreadful thing has happened, mother. I have had a letter from a girl I never heard of before; but, oh, she has a good excuse for writing. It is all about Catalina —she is accused of something dreadful—of course the girl thinks, and of course I know, that she is perfectly innocent.’

‘Show me the letter, my dear,’ said Mrs Ellworthy.

Madeline put it into her mother’s hands—she was trembling from head to foot, and the colour in her excitable little face was changing from white to red and back again to white. Mrs Ellworthy read Madeline’s carefully written letter with great attention. As she did so her own face flushed and her eyes shone with indignation.

‘This is quite a terrible business,’ she said; ‘and what in the world can this Margaret Ashton mean—she seems to think that we can help to prove dear Catty’s innocence.’

‘Of course, mother, of course. You notice what Miss Ashton says with regard to that horrid Rhoda Stanford. Well, mother, I may as well speak out; I never did like that girl, and I don’t think, in her heart of hearts, Mina Trevelyan does either.’

‘Well,’ said Mrs Ellworthy, ‘it is a very unpleasant

business from first to last. I almost wish your father were present.'

'Oh mother, I don't. Much as father admires Catty, you know he has peculiar views on some subjects. We must act, and at once—oh mother, do let us go straight away to the Trevelyan's.'

'My dear, it is a very awkward thing to begin to raise suspicion against a girl who, after all, may be innocent.'

'But, mother, you know Catty is innocent—you ought to think of her.'

'I do think of her, my love.'

'Then in her cause ought we to leave a stone unturned? Think of her bravery and her uprightness—could she stoop to anything low of that sort?'

'No, my dear, she could not. I shall never forget the extraordinary courage of that child in attacking your father in the way she did. Yes, of course we must do something.'

'And at once, mother, for a week will very soon run by, and if Catalina's innocence is not proved by next Tuesday she will be expelled from the Randall School. If such a thing happens it will crush her for life.'

'It will be an awful blow to her,' said Mrs Ell-worthy, 'but I don't think any mere earthly disaster could crush a spirit like Catalina's.'

'Oh yes, it could, mother, it would take something very fine out of her; she would no longer look on the world in her old happy way. The disgrace, mother,

and the knowing all the time that she was really innocent, and then the feeling that she could never carry on her dear, delightful life-work would worry her to death. Mother, don't let us lose a moment.'

'We won't, love. Really, Madeline, you quite carry me away with your enthusiasm. It is a very early hour to visit the Trevelyan's, but we'll go straight and see them. Run upstairs, Maddie dear, and fetch my bonnet and cloak, and put on your own hat, dearest.'

The little girl flew from the room, and a moment or two later she and her mother were going to the Trevelyan's beautiful house, which happened to be at the opposite side of the same square.

Mrs Trevelyan and Mina had only just finished breakfast, and were somewhat surprised to see visitors.

'We would not disturb you except on a very special matter,' said Mrs Ellworthy.

'You don't disturb us at all,' answered Mrs Trevelyan; 'we are delighted to see you and Maddie at any time. How is your cousin Catalina, dear Maddie?'

'It is about Catalina we have come,' answered Madeline.

'In that case Mina and I will be much interested. We took a great fancy to her. You told me, when last I mentioned her name, that she was to join the Randall School at the beginning of term. I suppose she is there now.'

'She is,' answered Mrs Ellworthy. 'It is on that

very matter we have come over now to consult you. The fact is this, dear Catty is in imminent danger of being expelled from the school.'

'Expelled!' cried Mina. 'Catalina in danger of being expelled from the Randall School?'

'Yes.'

'Then she cannot be a bit the girl I thought her,' continued Mina, her face flushing up. 'To merit a punishment of that kind she must have done something wrong, something very wrong.' After an emphatic pause, she added, 'I don't believe it.'

'It is a fact all the same, Mina, that she is in danger of being expelled,' said Mrs Ellworthy. 'But on the point of her innocence I have not the slightest doubt. Madeline received a letter from an art-student, this morning, of the name of Margaret Ashton, who also fully believes in Catalina's innocence.'

'Please tell us everything, Mrs Ellworthy,' said Mina.

'I will, but I must mention beforehand that I shall have something rather disagreeable to say.'

'Never mind what it is, only just tell us the whole simple truth.'

'It is a queer story, from first to last,' said Mrs Ellworthy. 'The unpleasant part for you, Mrs Trevlyan, lies in the fact that some of the art-students have taken up the idea that your niece, Rhoda Stanford, is implicated in this matter.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Mina. She had seated herself, but

now she started to her feet, her face turned a vivid crimson.

‘Yes,’ continued Mrs Ellworthy. ‘You will, I am sure, understand that this is an awkward matter for me.’

‘Not at all,’ said Mrs Trevelyan, in a thoughtful tone. ‘In a case of this kind, thorough investigations are bound to be made. If Rhoda has a share in the matter, the fact of her being my niece must not for a moment shield her. Only please remember, at this moment, that Mina and I are quite in the dark. I should of course be sorry to accuse Rhoda of a really grave fault, although I believe her to be a thoughtless and frivolous girl, still a thing of this sort’—

‘Mother,’ cried Mina, ‘do let us listen to the story.’

‘I will tell it at once,’ answered Mrs Ellworthy.

She then repeated the substance of Margaret Ashton’s letter, dwelling with force on the fact that Catty knew nothing of the piece of paper which was found in her bag, and that, as far as her memory could inform her, her caricatures of the masters had only been done in charcoal.

‘And you say that she is firmly convinced that she tore up the paper on which the charcoal drawings were executed?’ questioned Mrs Trevelyan.

‘She seems to be positive on that point, but can scarcely go against the evidence of her own eyesight;

copies of her work are not only found in her bag but on the masters' easels.'

'I want to say something, mother,' cried Mina.

'In a moment, dear,' replied her mother. 'Just now give me time to think.'

Mina fidgeted, half-rose from her seat, and then sat down again. Madeline, who was watching her eagerly, felt as if she could read her thoughts.

'Please tell me,' said Mrs Trevelyan, then turning to Mrs Ellworthy, 'if Miss Ashton, the girl who has written that letter, has any reason for supposing that Rhoda would practise a dastardly and cruel trick on Catalina.'

'She is supposed to be jealous of her.'

'But I cannot understand why. She seemed pleased when she met her at your house.'

'Nevertheless, Miss Ashton mentions that she is jealous.'

'Mother, please let me speak,' said Mina.

'I will presently, my dear. You must try and remember now that anything you say may be prejudicial either to your cousin or to Catalina Gifford. You must, therefore, carefully consider your words. In the meantime, I have one or two other questions to ask.'

'Is the idea,' continued Mrs Trevelyan, turning again to Mrs Ellworthy, 'that Rhoda is jealous of Catalina only the supposition of the girls of the Art School, or do they go upon facts?'

'They go on a couple of facts. Catalina's drawings have been much praised by the masters, to the detriment of Rhoda's. Catalina gave her opinion with regard to Rhoda's art very frankly on one occasion. She has several times been held up to Rhoda as an example by Professor Forde. Miss Ashton thinks that, provided she has not good principles, Rhoda would have enough motive to try to put the crime on Catalina.'

'This is most unpleasant,' said Mrs Trevelyan, rising. 'Rhoda is my sister's child, and I am naturally bound to uphold her. At the same time, I frankly say that I do not think highly of her character. I think the great difficulty of proving her guilty lies in the fact that she is not clever enough to caricature.'

'She may be able to copy the work of another,' said Mrs Ellworthy.

'Even to copy a caricature would be, I fancy, beyond her powers. She knows nothing whatever of figure-drawing, and has not a scrap of humour. Indeed, I have often begged of her to give up art.'

'Now, mother, may I speak?' said Mina.

'Yes, Mina, your turn has come at last.'

'I don't mean to do anything to injure Rhoda. She is my cousin, and although I don't care for her, I will not be unfair. What I want to ask is this, may I go up to town to see her?'

'You, Mina! You go to London now that all your school work has begun?'

‘That is a small matter under the circumstances. I want to see Rhoda, I want to have a very important talk with her. It is my opinion—yes, I think I may say that—that if I can see Rhoda I may be able to clear Catalina.’

‘Oh, Mina, Mina, how I love you,’ said Madeline.

‘And you can tell us nothing more, Mina?’ asked her mother.

‘Nothing more, mother; anything more would not be fair.’

‘Then, can you not write to Rhoda?’

‘That would do no good whatever. Rhoda could get round a letter, but she cannot get round me when I am face to face with her. Oh, mother, do let me go; it is so important.’

‘I don’t in the least know how it is to be managed,’ said Mrs Trevelyan. ‘I cannot leave home just at present, and it is impossible for a child like you to go to London alone.’

‘She shall not go alone,’ said Mrs Ellworthy, rising as she spoke. ‘Mina shall come with Madeline and me. It is our bounden duty to see my husband’s niece out of this difficulty. We will go to town to-night, and if you will allow us, will take Mina with us.’

‘Of course I cannot forbid it; but Mina, my child, do be careful.’

‘I will, mother, I will.’

CHAPTER XIX.

GEORGE.



THE Ellworthys and Mina went up to town by an afternoon train, and went straight to the 'Metropole.' The two girls were in a state of keen excitement; but Mrs Ellworthy begged of them not to talk any more over the matter.

'We come to town on most important business,' she said. 'We must all of us try to remember that the object of our visit is justice, not mercy. If we can clear Catalina it is our duty to do so; but it is equally our duty on no account whatever to divert suspicion to an innocent quarter. After you have seen your cousin, Mina, you will doubtless have something more to tell us; until then'—

'Even after I have seen her, I may not be able to tell much,' answered Mina; 'but the main thing is to have an interview with her, and that I hope I shall be able to manage the first thing in the morning.'

Early the next day, Mina asked Mrs Ellworthy if

she might order a hansom to take her to her cousin's house.

'The time has come at last,' she said. 'I could scarcely sleep last night for thinking about everything.'

'I wish I were you,' said Madeline. 'My part in this business is not nearly so exciting; I have only to sit still and wait.'

'We'll go and see Catalina, darling, and assure her of our sympathy,' said Mrs Ellworthy, putting her arm affectionately round her little daughter's waist.

'Oh, thank you, thank you, mother; that will be splendid.'

'But please do not say a word about me,' said Mina.

'Very well; we will not breathe your name.'

'And now, can I order that hansom?'

'Yes, dear, but take good care of yourself; come straight back here after you have seen your cousin. Don't get over-excited, and remember before all things, justice, justice.'

'It is because I do remember justice that I must see Rhoda,' answered Mina. There was a choking sensation in her throat, and tears were not very far from her eyes. This was the first time in her life that she had to act alone, and the task she had set herself was a really formidable one. She was two or three years younger than Rhoda, and not at all her match in cunning and duplicity.

‘I’ll keep justice and Catalina Gifford’s face well before me, and then I’ll be able to attack this horrid business with a will,’ thought the young girl. She leant back in the hansom, folded her hands together, and stared straight before her.

She was too excited to notice the London streets and the fine buildings which she quickly passed. On another occasion her drive would have interested her much, but now all her thoughts were centred elsewhere.

Rhoda’s home was in a fashionable part of Kensington, and the hansom drew up at the Stanfords’ hall-door soon after eleven o’clock. Mina jumped out, paid her fare, and then ran up the steps. When the door was opened she inquired if Rhoda were at home.

‘No, miss,’ replied the servant, ‘Miss Stanford is not living here at present; but I can give you her address in Bloomsbury if you really wish to see her.’

‘I certainly wish to see her,’ replied Mina, who was much discomfited by this intelligence. ‘Do you know if she lives at the Randall School of Art?’

‘Yes miss, at one of the boarding-houses, Mrs Gillespie’s. If you’ll just wait a moment I’ll run and ask my mistress for the exact number.’

‘Will you please tell my aunt that her niece, Mina Trevelyan, has called and would like to see her,’ said Mina, after a brief pause.

The maid withdrew, and the next moment Mrs Stanford, a fussy, good-humoured looking woman, with

a certain likeness to Rhoda, bustled out of an adjoining room. She greeted Mina with curiosity and affection.

‘My dear child, what in the world has brought you up to town?’

‘I have come up on purpose to see Rhoda. I want to have a special talk with her,’ said Mina, flushing as she spoke.

‘Dear me, how remarkable; I never knew that you and Rhoda were such extreme friends.’

‘Where is she, please, Aunt Susan? I want to see her without a moment’s delay.’

‘She does not live here just now, my love; she has taken the most extraordinary craze for art, not that I can see that she has any talent, poor child. Come in here, Mina, and let us have a chat; you are really looking well, and how you have grown! Where are you staying? Is your mother with you?’

‘No, mother is at Manchester. I am with the Ellworthys at the “Metropole.”’

‘The Manchester Ellworthys?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, you might have let me know, you naughty girl. Of course, I would have given you a bed.’

‘I could not have stayed, Aunt Susan. I have come up to see Rhoda, and of course want to hurry back to my work.’

‘Well, you must call at Mrs Gillespie’s. The best time to go is at dinner-time; they dine at one. Per-

haps you may manage to have a few minutes with Rhoda then.'

Mina stood silent, looking perplexed. A quiet talk with Rhoda in her own house was, she knew, a very different matter from a hasty interview with her in a crowded boarding-house. Mina knew that Rhoda would be quite able to shuffle out of a difficulty under the latter circumstances.

'I wish I could have seen her at once,' she said, after a pause; 'even an hour's delay is of consequence.'

'Well, my dear, I cannot help you; she would not thank you if you visited her at the school.'

'Of course not. Oh, by the way, Aunt Susan, how is George?'

'Much the same; he is never likely to be any better, poor fellow.'

'Do you think I could see him?'

'Yes, why not? I am sure he would like to have a chat with you.'

'Very well.' Mina's face brightened. 'Perhaps, after all, he will do nearly as well as Rhoda. Of course, it would be best for me to see Rhoda; but as I cannot, and as it is very important'—

'It must be to bring you up to town,' said Mrs Stanford. 'What can be the matter?'

'I daren't tell you, Aunt Susan; it is quite a secret.'

'All right, my love, I am the last person to spy into young girls' mysteries. But may I ask, do you intend to confide in George?'

‘I cannot quite say; I should like to see him. I have one or two questions I want to ask him.’

‘Well, I will take you upstairs.’

Mrs Stanford led the way and Mina followed. They paused on the drawing-room landing, and Mrs Stanford threw open a door which led into an inner drawing-room.

‘George,’ she cried, ‘I have brought you an unexpected visitor.’ As she spoke, she ushered Mina into the room.

On a sofa near the window a pale, dark-eyed boy was lying. He was stretched out flat, and it needed but a glance to see that he was a confirmed invalid. When his mother entered the room, a wave of colour rushed over his face; and he half raised his head, to fling it back the next moment with a weary gesture.

‘Is that you, Mina,’ he said; he held out his thin hand to his cousin, and Mrs Stanford left the boy and girl alone.

‘You don’t look a bit surprised to see me, George,’ said Mina.

‘Nothing surprises me,’ replied George. ‘Sometimes just for a moment I get a start, for my heart is very weak, you know; but nothing that could happen would ever surprise me.’

‘Well, that is a good thing. I have come now to talk to you over quite a private matter.’

‘A private matter; that sounds interesting. It is extremely difficult to really interest me in anything;

but confidences, really grave secrets, those sort of things have still a fascination. Mina, I can't compliment you on your looks ; you don't look a bit well.'

'I am well, but I am in a towering rage.'

'Are you really ; how silly. Nothing puts me in a rage.'

'Are you no better, George ?'

'Better ? of course not ; I shall never be better in this world. That is the nice part of it ; my time of captivity cannot possibly last much longer.'

'Oh Geordie, I am so sorry,' replied Mina. She dropped on her knees by her cousin's couch, and tried to take one of his hands.

'Never mind that sort of thing, Mina,' he answered, pushing her away from him ; 'I hate being coddled and fussed over and pitied. I am going soon to have a much better time than Rhoda, or you, or anybody else. I have no end of curiosity with regard to the future, the future beyond this life, I mean ; but all things connected with this stupid old world have ceased to interest me.'

'Have you given up your drawing ?'

'Not yet ; that amuses me now and then.'

'Please show me some of your last sketches.' Mina's voice quite shook as she spoke.

'Do you care about them ? I never knew you had the slightest love for art.'

'I have begun to love it lately ; some people of whom I am fond are much interested in it.'

‘Some people of whom you are fond—you don’t mean that old humbug of a Rhoda?’

‘No, indeed, I have known her all my life; there’s nothing fresh about her to interest me.’

‘How polite you are, Mina, to say that of your own cousin; never mind, she is my sister, and I frankly agree with you. She is an awful old humbug, is she not?’

‘Well, Geordie, it does not do for me to abuse her.’

‘I don’t mind abusing her a bit. It is such fudge her going to the Randall School. I tell her so, and she can’t bear me to laugh at her.’

‘How different you are, Geordie,’ said Mina; ‘if you had strength, you would be a great artist.’

‘That is true,’ replied the boy, a beautiful colour flushing into his delicate face. ‘Life would be worth living then, but as it is—— Oh, I fiddle away, but I cannot manage much.’

‘Do show me your work.’

‘I won’t until you tell me what you want to see it for?’

‘I can’t, George; it is something important; won’t you believe me?’

‘You look frightfully in earnest, Mina; it tires me even to look at your face. Well, well, I suppose I must yield. Haul over that big portfolio; you can open it here; you may pull out the case; the drawings are mostly caricatures.’

‘Caricatures,’ said Mina, with a leap at her heart.

‘Do you really go in for that sort of drawing?’

‘Of late I have ; it is such fun. I make the mother and Rhoda sit up, I can tell you. I do them in every sort of attitude ; then I pin up my attempts on the wall, and when father comes in, in the evening, he is fit to die with laughing. I always manage the likeness, you see.’

‘It must be amusing,’ said Mina. ‘May I see some ?’

‘Yes, it will interest me to show them to you ; but after all, the best caricatures are not in the portfolio. Go to that table over there, lift up those stupid old dictionaries, and you will find my drawing-book ; pull it out and bring it over here. Ah, here we are.’

Notwithstanding his cynicism, the young artist was really interested in his own clever sketches, and Mina could not help laughing heartily at his excellent portrayals of good-humoured Mrs Stanford and affected Rhoda in all sorts of attitudes and characters.

‘Here, this is Rhoda in her last new dress,’ he said ; ‘you know the kind of little perk she puts on when she thinks she is particularly fascinating ; this is Rhoda examining her last bangle ; this is Rhoda horribly jealous, because somebody else is doing better work than herself.’

‘But who is this ?’ asked Mina ; ‘what a clever caricature ! I did not know that you knew any professors, George.’

‘Nor do I, this is a copy which I took from another

caricature ; by the way, it is, I am told, a capital likeness of Professor Forde of the Randall School.'

'But you have never seen him ?'

'No, it is done from a copy.'

'A copy,' said Mina turning pale ; 'who gave you the copy, George ?'

'Rhoda, of course ; she brought back some sketches one day from school.'

'Oh,' cried Mina, 'do tell me everything.'

'What can be the matter, Mina ? How white you have turned.'

'It is most important,' said Mina ; 'it is vital ; do try and remember exactly what happened.'

'If you will only stand off a little, and not flash your big eyes at me—I hate girls with flashing eyes—I'll try and tell you what I know.'

George covered his face for a moment with one of his thin hands.

'I have it now,' he said. 'It happened a good bit back, some time towards the middle of last term. Rhoda came in one day in an awful rage. It turned out that she had been roundly scolded by one of the professors—this very Forde chap. Don't fidget so, Mina. I can't tell my story in such a frightful hurry. I asked her what was up. I generally call her Humpty-dumpty, because she has got such a pasty sort of face.'

““What's up now, Humpty-dumpty ?” said I, and then she muttered, and stormed, and finally burst out with

it. The professors were unfair, they were prejudiced. They always upheld other girls, and abused her. In particular, there was a horrid little dark girl—a sort of sneak. She said her name was Gifford. Well, Gifford was always puffed up to the disadvantage of poor Humpty-dumpty. I asked to see the precious work which was not appreciated. Well, Mina, it was poor work; shaky and groggy, and no life in it anywhere. So I said, "What can you expect when you do rubbish of that sort?" She was wild, poor old girl. Only that I am an invalid, and invalids must be respected, she would have flown at me. Then she said all of a sudden, "If you think that work so stupid, what do you think of this?" and then she opened a paper and showed me some bold caricatures done in charcoal. She told me they were of the professors. I never saw anything so life-like and funny; I could not help screaming with laughter.

"You have never done those?" I said.

"Yes. Indeed I have," she answered.

"Well, then, you do deserve to get a little praise," I said. "Why, we have never half appreciated you. You are a genius, after all."

"Am I?" she said, looking delighted.

"I should think so. Here, give me those sketches."

"What do you want them for?" she asked.

"I want to copy them this moment into my sketch-book. Why, they are splendid. Rhoda, my dear, you'll be a contributor to *Punch* some day. You'll

be a lot better than Harry Furniss, or Du Maurier, or any of those old chaps."

'She did look pleased. I copied the charcoal drawings into my book there and then. Why, Mina, what is the matter? Are you glad, too, that our Rhoda is to be a genius?'

'I want to hear the rest,' said Mina breathlessly.

'Well, it is soon told. When I had copied the sketches, she took the charcoal drawings away. I warned her not to let any one see them at the school. I assured her she would get into no end of a row. That fact seemed to strike her, and she asked me what would be done.'

'You would be expelled,' I said. 'What would the fact of your talent matter? If there's one thing a professor can't stand, it is being turned into ridicule.'

"But if I am so very clever, will they not rejoice in my talent?" she inquired.

"Not a bit of it," I replied. "You don't suppose they think more of you than they do of themselves. That would not be human nature."

'She thought a good bit of that, with her cheek resting on her hand. I sketched her in that attitude. Here she is.'

'Geordie. What a funny boy you are,' said Mina, who, notwithstanding her anxieties, could not help laughing. 'Well, have you anything more to tell me?'

'Only this. I was anxious two or three weeks after-

wards to get father to give me a new Kodak—quite an extraordinarily nice one—it would cost five pounds. Rhoda found out that I wanted it, and she said she could coax the money out of father if I would do something for her.'

'And did you do it?'

'Yes.'

'And what was it, Geordie?'

'Oh, nothing much—I never could make out what she wanted it for, though. She asked me to outline the professors' caricatures on tracing-paper for her. As I wanted my Kodak in a frightful hurry I was not long doing what she wished. She caught up the tracings, thanked me, and a moment or two later brought me back a crisp five-pound note. She is a girl to get things out of father—he would not have given me that money without a power of worry. Well now, is there anything else?'

'I don't think so to-day.'

'That's a relief. Now please put the sketch-book back exactly where you found it. What! are you going?'

'After I have said something.'

'I do hope it is not too exciting, Mina—please remember my state of health.'

'Oh, Geordie dear, I do—but perhaps that is just the reason why you will help me.'

'Help you? I am the most useless chap on earth. Helping people is not at all my forte.'

‘ Well, it happens to be on this occasion. You would like to do something really great before you die, would not you ? ’

‘ I don’t know, I am sure. Well, out with your request whatever it is.’

‘ I have something to tell you first. Rhoda never did those charcoal drawings.’

‘ Oh, come now, Mina, I like that. Why should she tell a lie about them ? ’

‘ She never did them ; they were not her work.’

‘ Are you certain ? ’

‘ Positive. I can prove it to your complete satisfaction.’

‘ Oh, don’t bother about proof. I’ll take your word for it. I always did think they were twenty times too clever for her. Anything else ? ’

‘ They were the work of another girl.’

‘ Well, I suppose so ; they must have been done by somebody. Who was the girl ? ’

‘ I won’t mention her name yet. They were the work of this girl ; and Rhoda—she stole them for her own purposes—the other girl has got into dreadful trouble.’

‘ How so ? ’

‘ Because, George, Rhoda—Rhoda has done a shabby, a disgraceful, a terrible thing.’

‘ Oh, my goodness ! how many more adjectives ? Do go straight ahead. How like a girl you are.’

‘ I am a girl, and an angry one. Now, I will tell you

my story. At the end of last term some caricatures were found on the professors' easels. They were exact copies of these'—Mina pointed to the spirited drawings in George's book. 'The professors were very angry, and they made a great fuss about the matter. A few days ago, the first day of term, the sin was brought home to a girl in the school, Catalina Gifford—about the cleverest student in the school.'

'What, the little gypsy that Rhoda can't bear?'

'The same. I wish you knew her, George—she is a splendid girl, and has the most beautiful face I ever saw. She is accused of having drawn the caricatures, and unless she can prove her innocence by next Tuesday, she is to be expelled from the school.'

'You don't say so. What a thundering shame!'

George was really excited and interested at last.

'But I am quite sure now,' continued Mina, 'that I know enough to clear her. What I want you to do, George, is this: When you are asked, stick to the story you have just told me.'

'Stick to it—of course I shall. You don't suppose I am the sort of fellow to go back on my word.'

'No, but please remember that you will get your sister into terrible trouble.'

'I begin to see what you are driving at, Mina. You don't mean to say that Rhoda—Rhoda'—

'Yes, I do,' said Mina, nodding.

'Good gracious!'

‘You’ll stick to what you have just told me, George?’

‘Rather; you need not fear.’

‘Then you are a brave darling,’ said Mina. She stooped and kissed her cousin on his forehead.

He was very angry, and rubbed the spot hard; but that did not matter at all to Mina, who had flown from the room.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS GILLESPIE'S BOARDING-HOUSE.



HE excited girl drove straight off to the Randall School. Her hansom drew up at Mrs Gillespie's house, and she eagerly inquired for her cousin, Rhoda Stanford. She was here met by very discomfiting intelligence. Rhoda was unwell—was supposed to have influenza, and no one was allowed to see her. This was indeed a foil.

‘What shall I do?’ thought Mina to herself. She scribbled a little note which was sent up to her cousin.

‘Try and get well as fast as possible,’ wrote Mina.
‘I want to see you on a most important matter.’

This note was conveyed to Rhoda's sick-room. She was flushed and had a headache, but in no other way was specially ill. She eagerly seized the note; and when she had read it began to feel rather uncomfortable. ‘Why was Mina in town? and why did she want to see her? What could the important matter be?’

Up to the present, Rhoda had not been specially sorry for what she had done; but Mina's note made her think of Catalina in the queerest, most insistent way, and she began to be nervous. She tried to recall everything she had said to Mina during her visit in the summer. Yes, she had certainly told her cousin something about the caricatures; she had also given her to understand that she herself was a proficient in that dangerous art. Suppose Mina had come to town on that business? But no, it really was impossible. In the first place, how could she have heard anything about it? In the next, even if she had, would she be likely to care?

'Dear, dear, I hope there is not going to be any serious fuss,' thought the wicked girl. 'Of course, when I began all this I had no thought whatever of injuring Catalina; but to save myself I was obliged to throw the blame on her, and now of course I must stick to the thing to the bitter end. After all, there cannot be the least chance of my being found out. Mina probably wants to see me on quite another matter. There are one or two things which I let out in a silly moment, which she might possibly use against me; but no one in the world is really in a position to expose me except poor old George; and as to George doing anything, the mere idea is too absurd. Well, I shall be glad when this horrid week is out. The other girls are specially disagreeable to me. I had no idea that tiresome little Catalina was such a

favourite. I almost begin to wish I had not returned to the school.'

Mina's disquieting note was not good for Rhoda's state of health, and she tossed about on her hot bed, and wished that the influenza had not attacked her at such a critical moment.

By the evening's post a letter arrived which by no means added to her feelings of comfort; it was from her brother George, and was specially short.

'Dear Rhoda,' he wrote, 'I have been having a very straight talk with Mina Trevelyan about you. I have promised her that if necessary I will speak up for the truth. I often thought you were something of a humbug, but now I regard you as also a sneak.—Your disgusted brother, GEORGE.'

When Rhoda read this letter she turned white as a sheet.

Then there was something up! Mina had got hold of George, and George had revealed the truth to her. Of course, if he liked, George could make most serious mischief. Rhoda was now seriously alarmed. She slept very little that night, and in the morning was heavy-eyed and weak. When the doctor came to see her he said that all feverishness had gone, but that she was weak, and he would order her a tonic.

'You are more pulled down,' he said, 'than your slight attack warrants. Is anything worrying you?'

'Oh, no,' she answered, with a toss of her head. 'I

suppose it would not do for me to go back to school for a few days ?'

'No, you had better stay in your room for a day or two longer. After an attack of this sort, one cannot be too careful.'

On reflection, Rhoda was pleased on hearing that she might consider herself a prisoner.

'It is just as well that I should not be present when poor Catty is expelled,' she said to herself. 'I don't see that Mina can do much, unless she has an interview with me. I am probably alarming myself considerably without just cause. Yes, if I can manage to stay quietly in my room until Tuesday is over, I think I shall keep out of this horrid scrape.'

Having made up her mind, Rhoda then proceeded to make herself as comfortable as circumstances would permit. She wrote to Mrs Stanford to beg for a parcel of yellow-backed novels and two or three boxes of mixed chocolates. As Mrs Stanford always did exactly as her daughter wished, this request was attended to immediately, and Rhoda sat by her fire and munched chocolates and read novels during the whole of the day.

In this way she was able to keep troublesome thoughts at a distance, and by no means disliked her solitary time.

Meanwhile, poor Mina was nearly wild with anxiety. She had determined not to tell what she knew to the Ellworthys. She knew a great deal, but not quite all.

In order to be quite sure of clearing Catalina, she must see Rhoda herself.

'What does the influenza matter?' she said to Mrs Ellworthy. 'My whole visit to town will be wasted if I cannot have an interview with Rhoda before the 23d.'

'But is an interview with Rhoda the only thing that can save Catalina?' asked Mrs Ellworthy.

'Yes, I believe it is.'

'Don't you think, Mina, you might confide in me?'

'I would much rather see Rhoda, Mrs Ellworthy. Of course, if I don't, and the very last moment comes—— Oh, but I must not think of that.'

Poor Mina really looked ill. Even Madeline did not fret over Catalina as badly as Mina did.

'Madeline does not know the worst,' murmured the poor girl; 'it is my cousin who has done the shabby, the disgraceful thing. If I could only see Rhoda I would insist on her making a full confession. Oh, I feel terrible. See her I will, see her I must.'

When Monday evening arrived, a great gloom hung over Mrs Gillespie's house. The week was nearly up, and Catalina had not been able to make the slightest discovery with regard to the guilty person. All the girls knew her story, and were full of sympathy and excitement; some of course fearing that she might be guilty, but the greater part stoutly maintaining her innocence.

She was running downstairs on this evening, when

she came face to face with Mina Trevelyan. She started, and coloured painfully. Had Mina heard everything; did she or did she not believe in her guilt?

'How are you, Miss Gifford?' said Mina, holding out her hand, and speaking in an affectionate tone. 'Do you happen to know how my cousin, Rhoda, is?'

'No, only that she is still in her room,' replied Catalina. 'Perhaps Dr Blunt will tell you; I see him coming downstairs.'

'The doctor who attends her? That is capital,' said Mina. 'I must speak to him at once.'

Catalina ran on, and Mina went up the stairs to meet the doctor.

'Are you attending my cousin, Rhoda Stanford?' she asked.

'Yes,' he replied.

'Then, please, sir, may I speak to you?'

'Certainly,' answered the doctor. He opened the door of a small room on the drawing-room landing.

'Your cousin has had a slight attack of influenza,' he said. 'You need not be at all anxious about her. If you have anything special to say, will you come in here?'

Mina entered.

'I want to ask if Rhoda is well enough for me to see her. I want to talk to her about something of vital importance,' said the little girl.

‘Certainly you can see her,’ replied the doctor.
‘Any one may see her after she has taken a bath.’

‘Then, may I go to her now?’

‘It would not be wise for you to go to her room; that of course is full of infection. The fact is, I gave Miss Stanford permission to come downstairs on Sunday, but she did not avail herself of it.’

‘And this is Monday, Monday evening. I must see her to-night.’

The doctor smiled.

‘Won’t to-morrow morning do?’ he asked.

‘No, sir; it would not be safe to leave it until then. Oh, Dr Blunt, if only you would help me.’

‘You seem very much in earnest,’ said the doctor.
‘If you have anything to confide, pray do so as quickly as possible.’

‘I will tell you, then. There is a girl in the Randall School, a very nice girl, Catalina Gifford is her name. To-morrow something dreadful is going to be done to her; a crime has been brought to her door of a grave nature, and she is to be expelled from the school. She is the cleverest art student in the school, and yet she is to be expelled; all her life that stigma will cling to her. Now, I know a person who can prove that she is not guilty, and that person is my cousin, Rhoda Stanford.’

‘Indeed,’ said Dr Blunt, ‘this is interesting.’

‘It is more than interesting to Catalina. You don’t know what a splendid girl she is. There is

terrible circumstantial evidence against her, and Rhoda can save her; but only—*only* if I can see Rhoda to-night.'

'I understand,' said the doctor. 'Will you leave this matter with me, and sit down quietly where you are? I shall have news for you in a moment or two.'

He left the room as he spoke.

Mina waited with a palpitating heart. The moments seemed weighted with lead; she wondered what was going to happen. At the end of half an hour the room door was flung open, and Dr Blunt's smiling face peeped in.

'I have managed all right for you, little girl,' he said. 'This way, please, Miss Stanford; you will find your cousin here.'

Rhoda, looking angry, flushed, and disturbed, stalked into the room. The doctor shut the door behind the two.

'Well, Mina, pray tell me what is the meaning of all this fuss,' said Rhoda. 'What in the world do you want to see me for? Why was I dragged out of my room, and forced into a horrid bath, and brought downstairs by that disagreeable, interfering doctor? What can be the meaning of it? You are as red as a turkey cock. Now, what do you want me for? What is up?'

'You'll know soon enough,' said Mina. 'Rhoda, I have found out all the true story of the caricatures.'

'The true story of the caricatures,' began Rhoda. She tried to laugh, but she turned white.

'Yes, I know everything: I went to see George, and he told me.'

'Oh, George; as if any one minded what a boy like George would say.'

'Rhoda, there is no use in your talking in that silly way. I know the whole truth. You did a very dreadful thing when you tried to ruin Catalina—a very dreadful thing for Catalina, and a still worse thing for yourself. You never guessed, I suppose, that Catalina had plenty of friends. Some of her friends wrote to the Ellworthys to Manchester, and the Ellworthys came and talked to mother and me; and then I remembered something you had said about certain caricatures, and I came to town to find out more; and when I could not see you, I had an interview with George, and George told me everything. You had found poor Catalina's charcoal drawings, and you had brought them home and shown them to George as your own work. Afterwards, you asked him to make copies of the caricatures on tracing-paper. What you did with the tracing-paper I can guess, although I am not sure. Now, I wish to say that unless you tell me the whole truth from beginning to end, I shall go to the Randall School to-morrow, and tell exactly what I know. George is too ill to go with me, but I have no doubt that Professor Forde will go to see him if neces-

sary, in order to confirm my story. You see, Rhoda, that you may as well tell the truth; for in any case you will be brought in guilty.'

'You mean,' said Rhoda after a pause, 'that you will really do what you say?'

'Yes,' said Mina; 'if you don't speak, I shall.'

'But you are my cousin. Cousins don't get each other into disgrace.'

'If I were fifty times your cousin I would not allow Catalina to be ruined for life.'

'Catalina again,' muttered Rhoda. 'What is there about that wretched girl that makes you all fall in love with her?'

'Nothing, except that she is brave and true. Oh Rhoda, how could you do it; how could you think of this horrible, this cruel plot to ruin her?'

'I did not at all mean to injure her when I did it,' said Rhoda, startled into admitting the truth. 'At first—oh, I suppose, I may go on now, and let out the whole thing—at first, Mina, I had no more thought of injuring Catalina than I had of injuring you. The professors all hated me, and I determined to play a practical joke at their expense. Then, when I saw that it was becoming formidable, I got frightened, and it seemed easy enough to shift the blame on to Catalina. I did it. Once done, I had to stick to it, you understand.'

'I suppose I do. I suppose when you begin doing wrong you cannot help doing worse, and getting

yourself deeper and deeper into the most horrid and terrible treachery.'

'Well, yes, I suppose so.' Rhoda sat down as she spoke. 'I wonder,' she said, after a pause, as Mina was quite silent, 'what you propose to do now that you have dragged the truth out of me?'

'What I propose to do?' said Mina. 'It is you that have to do the thing, Rhoda.'

'I am not going to do anything.'

'Yes, you must. You must do exactly what I tell you.'

'And pray what is that?'

'Sit down and write a confession to Professor Forde.'

'What next?' said Rhoda. 'You cannot mean what you say, Mina.'

'I do; the only other alternative is that I go to the Randall School to-morrow and tell what I know; then you'll be sent for, and you'll have to confess your guilt in the presence of the whole school.'

'Oh, anything but that,' said Rhoda. Her face turned pale, her hand shook.

'I have been ill; this is dreadfully bad for me,' she moaned.

'It would be worse for poor Catty if she were to be expelled, for a crime she never committed, to-morrow morning.'

'I hate Catalina Gifford,' muttered Rhoda.

'Whether you hate her or not, you must confess the

whole truth now, and in writing. Here is paper and here are pens and ink. Sit down and begin.'

'I declare, Mina, I don't know you.'

'I dare say not; I am desperate,' said Mina. 'Now seat yourself, Rhoda, and begin to write.'

'When I have written this odious, horrible letter, I suppose I may go away ?'

'You may do anything you like, as far as I am concerned.'

'Mother had better take me abroad. I cannot stay in England after this.'

Mina was silent.

'Why don't you speak; have you got nothing to say ?'

'Nothing, except to insist on your doing your duty.'

'Well, then, here goes.' Rhoda dipped her pen into the ink. 'What am I to say ?' she asked.

'The truth, Rhoda; tell Professor Forde the truth.'

'Dear Professor Forde,' began Rhoda, then she dashed down her pen, and faced round upon her cousin.

'How can I write this sort of thing ? You put too difficult a task on me. I'd rather be silent, and take the consequences.'

'Very well. Then, to-morrow you'll be sent for, and you'll have to tell before the whole school.'

'Oh, anything but that. I shudder at the look which I am certain to see in Margaret Ashton's eyes.'

And Lucy Gray will also gloat over me, and that horrid little Gifford girl will be petted, and praised, and cheered. Oh, anything but that. Whatever happens, I'll not be there.'

'Then, write, Rhoda, and be quick about it.'

'But I don't know what to say.'

'I'll dictate the letter to you.'

'I wish you would.'

'Write this, Rhoda: "Dear Professor Forde, I am the person who sketched the caricatures on your easel and on Professor Johnson's and Mr Fortescue's. I found some charcoal drawings of Catalina Gifford's on the floor, and picked them up and brought them home. My brother copied them for me on tracing-paper. I did not tell him what I wanted them for. I brought them back to the school. One evening I was alone in the studio, and I was able, by means of the tracing-paper, to make pen and ink sketches from Catalina's caricatures on the different easels. That is the story."

Rhoda, who had hastily dashed down the words which her cousin had dictated, now looked up with a flushed face.

'This is a pretty kind of thing,' she exclaimed. 'A nice exhibition I am making of myself. Anything more, Mina?'

'You can add anything more you like.'

Rhoda glanced through her letter.

'After all, it may as well go as it is,' she said. 'I'll

just sign it. Here, I suppose you'll do what you like with it now.'

Mina read the letter carefully over.

'It is bad,' she said; 'but at least it is clear, and it completely exonerates Catalina. Now, Rhoda, please, direct this envelope.'

Rhoda directed it to Professor Forde, Randall School of Art, and Mina slipped it into her pocket.

'Now, I wonder what you are going to do?' asked Rhoda.

'I am going straight to Professor Forde's house, to put this into his letter-box.'

'You have no thought for me, you wretched girl.'

'At present I have no kind thoughts towards you, Rhoda. Perhaps by-and-by I shall be sorry. If only —only you would be sorry for yourself. If only you could really feel how dreadfully you have behaved!'

'For goodness' sake, don't begin to preach, Mina; that will just be the final straw. Good-bye. I suppose you think yourself a very clever girl; and I suppose for that matter you are. My kind regards to that precious Catalina of yours. For my part, I hope never to see her again.'

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LUCKIEST GIRL.



AVING delivered her letter, Mina Trevelyan went back to the hotel where the Ellworthys were staying, and kept her secret to herself.

‘They will know time enough,’ she reflected. ‘Matters are sure to be quite safe now; and dear little Catty will be saved.’ Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes very bright; and smiles of happiness played round her lips. Mrs Ellworthy and Madeline both remarked these.

‘I am sure you have good news,’ said Madeline. ‘And I think you might tell me.’

‘Yes; I have very good news,’ answered Mina; ‘but I would rather not say anything about it until to-morrow. I think perhaps,’ she added, ‘that we might all go to the Randall School to-morrow.’

‘What? To witness Catty’s disgrace?’

Mina coloured.

‘I think we might go,’ she said, after a pause. ‘I should like it for one.’

‘It is a good idea,’ said Mrs Ellworthy. ‘At the worst, dear Catty will want us to help her. If the professors are so dreadfully unjust as to believe that that dear child is guilty, I at least will show that I do not believe it. We will take Catty back with us to Manchester, and thus our own friends will know what we think about her.’

‘That is a capital idea, mother,’ said Madeline. ‘Oh, how earnestly I wish to-morrow would come. I really feel that I cannot live much longer in this terrible state of suspense.’

The evening passed somehow; and by-and-by the long-wished-for morning arrived.

There was much excitement at the Randall School. From one studio to another the news of Catty’s disgrace and of the trial through which she was to pass had flown. The students had formed themselves into sides for and against Catalina. Some fully believed in her innocence; but a large number were inclined to consider her guilty. Her name was on every lip. Boys and girls alike talked a great deal about her. Her beauty, her talent, the terrible cloud which hung over her, were discussed eagerly from tongue to tongue. Was she going to be expelled? Was her career as an artist about to be ruined? What would

Professor Forde really do? Above all things, was she guilty? was she innocent?

The professors appeared as usual. They hurried the students into their different class-rooms, and the ordinary work of the morning began. The girls who belonged to the Animal School of Painting took their places behind their easels. A splendid race-horse was brought in as the model for the morning's work. At another time this beautiful creature would have raised quite a storm of enthusiasm; but the horse was scarcely looked at to-day. Other thoughts occupied every mind. When would Catalina appear? What would happen to her when she did? Would her friends rally round her? Would the Professor really expel her from school?

These were the questions which each girl asked out of her eyes or formed on her lips; the whole school was full of Catty. For good or for evil, she was the one heroine of the hour.

Presently the studio door was opened, and Catalina, in a somewhat dowdy frock, her face pale and her eyelids lowered, softly entered the room. She went straight to her place beside her easel, and taking up a charcoal pencil, began with rapid strokes to sketch in an outline of the splendid horse. Her work had never been better; she did not glance at any of her companions.

‘She seems to know that she may not have another chance,’ said one girl to another. Catty was eagerly

sketching in the horse's head; the eye of the noble creature looked full of subdued fire.

'How splendidly she does it,' said another student, peeping over the little girl's shoulder.

At that moment Professor Forde appeared, and with him Mrs Ellworthy, Madeline, and Mina.

'Who can they be?' whispered the girls one to another; but Catalina did not raise her eyes.

There came a solemn sort of hush. Professor Forde having supplied the ladies with seats, went himself to a raised platform which stood at one end of the long room. Here the three easels with the caricatures were placed. The Professor stepped on to the platform, and facing abruptly round encountered the eager eyes of the students all turned to face him. Catalina alone kept on sketching; her nervous fingers were full of the inward fire which was consuming her; she felt as if she were working in a sort of purgatory; there were buzzing noises in her ears, her eyes could scarcely see. All the same, her fingers felt inspired, they never made a wrong stroke; the horse seemed to grow in life and beauty under her skilful manipulation.

'Catalina Gifford,' said Professor Forde's voice.

The charcoal fell from Catty's nervous fingers. She turned round; her pale face became suffused with crimson.

'Catalina Gifford, I have something to tell you,' continued the Professor. 'Will you come up

here, and let me speak to you before the whole school ?'

A girl stretched out her hand to help Catty, several eyes were fixed upon her full of wondering pity, and yet all through the school the Professor's words seemed also to inspire a sort of hope.

Catalina went up to the platform, and the Professor took her hand.

'I have something to tell you, my dear pupil,' he said, 'something which gives me, on your account, absolute pleasure, but on account of another girl pain. The pleasure is caused by this: I have heard news which completely and absolutely exonerates you from all blame.'

Here his words were interrupted by a perfect storm of cheers, handkerchiefs waved in the air, feet were stamped loudly on the floor. Whatever the girls thought beforehand, they were all now on Catalina's side.

'My dear pupils, pray restrain your emotions,' continued the Professor. 'I must beg you to give me your careful attention for the next few minutes. Catalina spoke the simple truth when she told us what had occurred with regard to the caricatures this day week. In a reckless moment she sketched likenesses of myself and my brother professors, but with no thought of doing us an injury or exposing us to the least breath of ridicule. That work was left to the cruel machinations of another girl.

Catalina is absolutely without blame in the matter; but I much regret to have to add that as another girl has acted so badly, there is nothing whatever for me to do but to expel her from the school. I allude to Rhoda Stanford, who has written me a confession which I will now proceed to read aloud.'

The Professor took Rhoda's letter from his pocket.

'I am the person who sketched the caricatures on your easel,' he read, 'and on Professor Johnson's and Mr Fortescue's. I found some charcoal drawings of Catalina Gifford's on the floor, and picked them up and brought them home. My brother copied them for me on tracing-paper. I did not tell him what I wanted them for. I brought them back to the school. One evening I was alone in the studio, and I was able, by means of the tracing-paper, to make pen and ink sketches from Catalina's caricatures on the different easels. That is the story.'

The Professor threw the letter on the floor and looked down the room.

There were no cheers this time, but the girls' faces looked dark and their eyes flashed with indignation.

'We will turn from this unpleasant subject,' he said. 'Catalina Gifford, I am glad to be able to acknowledge your innocence in the face of the whole school; this letter, painful as it is in itself, abundantly clears you from the least shadow of blame. Now I have one last word to say before we resume our work.

The Randall Scholarship will of course be competed for this session, and, Catalina, I will enter your name amongst the competitors. I shall also be glad if you will do me the honour to come to see me at my house this evening. I am anxious to have a long talk with you, for I am much interested in your Art career.'

'Three cheers for Catalina. We always knew Catty was innocent,' burst now from the excited girls.

'I will leave you for a few moments,' said the Professor, smiling. 'When I return I hope you will all have composed yourselves and be able to resume your duties.—In the meanwhile, Catalina, I think some of your friends are waiting to speak to you.'

'Yes, Catty, I did not dare to come to you before,' said her aunt. 'My dear child, how happy I am; how glad we all are!'

'I declare, Catty, this is the very proudest moment of my life,' said Madeline.

'And it would be of mine,' remarked Mina, 'if I were not so unfortunate as to own Rhoda as my cousin.'

'Well, never mind that now, Mina,' said Madeline. 'But for you we should never have discovered the truth. Catty, you must love Mina all your life, for she simply forced the facts of the case out of that horrid Rhoda.'

‘After the Professor’s invitation, you, Catalina, are made for life,’ said Margaret Ashton, in the course of that same day.

‘I consider Catalina the luckiest girl in the whole school,’ said another girl.

‘Hurrah for Catalina, Art Student!’ exclaimed a third. ‘May she live long and her name flourish! ’

THE END.

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